

# **Locating Self through Adoption Homeland Tours: A Phenomenological Approach**

by

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## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## **ABSTRACT**

Tourism and adoption are separate subjects, which are both well-studied. Studies that look at adoption and tourism together are hard to find. Generally, these studies are written from a social work perspective rather than a tourism perspective. Works by Muller, Gibbs and Ariely (2003); Passmore (2005); and Sachdev (1991) are examples of these types of studies. However there is a small amount of research written from a tourism perspective, which focuses on adult adoptees that travel back to their homeland to explore their roots. Amongst tour operators, these types of tours are known as Adoption Homeland Tours and cater specifically to adoptees to show them the place and culture of their biological roots. As Sachdev (1992) points out, “since the professionals have only recently directed their attention to the phenomenon of search and reunion between adoptees and their biological parents, research studies are exceedingly limited” (p. 54).

This study aims to address this under-represented area of tourism research by providing a baseline understanding of the subject as understood through a phenomenological perspective and bring forward the term “Adoption Homeland Tours” to the academic community. Moreover, this study aims to explore the meanings adoption homeland tourists attribute to their experiences and to contextualize the findings within broader academic approaches towards understanding dynamics which influence adult adoptees’ understanding of self through tourism experiences.

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Elli Bogdan. Your unwavering love, support and encouragement throughout my many years of schooling have not gone unnoticed. I know that my journey to explore my roots and get to know my biological family has not always been easy for you but you recognized how important this would be for me and always supported me in my journey of self-discovery. For this, I want to thank you wholeheartedly and in saying so, I want to dedicate this thesis to you. It is a work that I could not have completed without your understanding, support and strength.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*I was born on Sunday, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1985 as Shannon Marie Acton. I'm told that it was a beautiful day, the leaves on the trees were just starting to unfold and the promise of spring was in the air. My birth-mother had just finished university and had been accepted into graduate school when she learned she was expecting me. My birth-parents had met in University and dated for a year but my birth-father had no interest in raising a child and had returned home to Alberta as soon as Convocation was over, leaving my birth-mother in Ontario. She planned to keep me and raise me but as her due date approached she began to question whether she could give me the life she wanted me to have while she was a single, graduate student. When she was eight months pregnant she went to the Children's Aid Society to explore the idea of adoption and ultimately decided that adoption was the best choice for me. When she finally went into labor, she was accompanied to the hospital by her mother, my maternal grandmother. My grandmother was the only one who held me after I was born as my birth-mother says that if she had held me she wouldn't have been able to give me up. To this day, my grandmother's face remains as my earliest memory. Soon after I was born, my birth-mother and grandmother returned home and I was put into foster care. Three weeks later, I was adopted and joined my new family with my new name: Stephanie Elizabeth Bogdan. My adoptive parents always made a point of telling me that I was adopted and that I was special because they had chosen me. However as I got older, my questions about my identity, my day-dreams about what my birth parents were like, and my feelings of disconnection from my adoptive family grew. Sometimes people asked me what it was like to be adopted and I would tell them that I was a stranger to myself. I had no blood connection to a single person I knew. I didn't know where I came from or why I was the way I was; I just was. I felt like there was nothing to anchor or connect me to anything else and this created a feeling of emptiness and loneliness in my life. In 2003, when I was eighteen years old, I applied through the Children's Aid Society to find my birth relatives. In order for the Children's Aid Society to release any information about my birth relatives that would allow me to contact them, my birth relatives had to have applied to find me as well. I moved a lot at that time as I was in University and sub-letting apartments to save money. Every time I moved I would call the Children's Aid Society and give them my new contact information. Every time they would remind me how long the waiting list was and that they would call me if they got any news. Eventually, I stopped listening to what they were saying and would say thank you and then hang up when they finished reading me the script about the procedures to connect adoptees with birth relatives. Fast forward to 2007, I was on another phone call with the Children's Aid Society updating contact information. I remember that it was a warm, spring day; I remember that I was wearing my favourite corduroy pants and hoody, the sunshine was pouring through the windows of my living room where sunbeams danced across the walls. I was filing my nails and not really paying attention while I listened to the person on the other end of the phone drone on about privacy laws: "you know that any information about birth relatives can only be released when there is a mutual interest in making contact but actually we spoke to your birth-mother the other day and she really wants to get in touch with you" – WHAT? I stopped filing my nails and asked the representative to repeat himself. "Yep, I talked to her the other day, she came into the office actually to sign the paper work and she really*

*wants to get in touch with you". My heart was beating out of my chest and I had a smile plastered across my face from ear to ear. I stuttered through the rest of the phone call, my emotions so strong that I was having difficulty speaking normally, and managed to give the man my information to send over my birth-mother's contact information. I received it shortly, and with my heart in my throat, I dialed the number listed beside her name. When the call went to voicemail I heard my birth-mother's voice for the first time. Not wanting to wait for her to check her voicemail I decided to try sending a text message to the number listed as her cell phone: "Hi this is Shannon, aka Stephanie, your daughter. How are you?" That weekend was one of the longest of my life as I anxiously waited to hear from her. Finally after several days, a message from an unknown number lit up my cell phone screen: "It's been far too long sweetie. I'm sorry to keep you waiting with a reply but your brother threw my cell phone in the bathtub and I had to go buy a new one". I burst out laughing while fat, heavy, happy tears rolled down my cheeks. We tried texting for a few minutes but it was just too slow for all the things we had to say to each other so we switched to emailing. After a flurry of non-stop emails for the next two weeks, we decided to meet in person and have lunch. Meeting her in person was a completely surreal and bizarre experience. We did our best to catch up on 22 years of life within the allotted time-frame of a downtown-Toronto express lunch date. The lady at the table beside us almost fell off her chair she was leaning over so far trying to eavesdrop. We inadvertently ordered the same meals and laughed nervously afterwards about it. My hands shook with the intensity of the situation as we sat across the table from one another and seasoned our food the same way as if we'd been eating meals together my whole life. Later, while walking through the Eaton's centre we kept stopping to look at the same clothing displays in what turned out to be shared favourite stores. I was keenly aware of how normal and mundane the two of us strolling through the mall together must appear to anyone who observed us in spite of the fact that this was the most significant and illuminating day of my life thus far. It was everything I had always hoped for and what I never expected to happen. Finally, I had found someone with whom I was alike. Someone who understood me, shared interests, likes and dislikes. The feeling of finally knowing someone who instinctively "got me" was indescribable. Later, when it was time for me to leave to go home it took everything in me to walk away from the person I had waited my entire life to reunite with. She was the shore and I was the waves being pulled back out to sea against my will. With her, I was finally complete.*

As an adult adoptee, I have an intimate understanding of what it is like to be adopted, to search for biological relatives and travel back to my homeland. My experience as an adoptee has involved many mixed emotions as I negotiated what it means to be adopted and to belong in different ways to the culture of my adopted family and to the culture of my biological family. When I was twelve my adoptive mother presented me with a gold locket and a letter, which when I was an infant, my birth mother had given the social worker to pass on to me when

I was old enough to appreciate and understand their meaning. In the letter and the locket I found a message: my birth mother cared about me, my birth mother wanted us to reunite one day.

At the age of twenty-two I was able to make contact with my biological mother who had also applied to make contact with me and a reunion with her and her immediate and extended family followed. While this reunion brought many emotions to the surface, it was a very positive experience overall and I have remained close to my biological mother and her family. A year later I was able to reunite with my biological father. This reunion was more difficult and I learned that his family was unaware of my existence. Although I knew it was unrealistic, I hoped that one day I might have the opportunity to meet my paternal grandparents.

Tourism and adoption are separate subjects, which are both well-studied. Studies that look at adoption and tourism together are hard to find. Generally, these studies are written from a social work perspective rather than a tourism perspective. Works by Muller, Gibs and Ariely (2003); Passmore (2005); and Sachdev (1991) are examples of these types of studies. However there is a small amount of research written from a tourism perspective, which focuses on adult adoptees who travel back to their homeland to explore their roots. Amongst tour operators, these types of tours are known as Adoption Homeland Tours and cater specifically to adoptees to show them the place and culture of their biological roots. For example, Barbara Yngvesson's (2003) study of Swedish adult adoptees' tour back to the village in Chile from where they were adopted is one of the few studies focusing on this type of tourism. More recently, Powers (2011) work focusing on Adoption Tourism and Identity as understood by Chinese-born adoptees has helped raise awareness of Adoption Tourism and its significance for adoptees within academic circles. As Sachdev (1992) points out, "since the professionals have only recently directed their attention to the phenomenon of search and reunion between

adoptees and their biological parents, research studies are exceedingly limited” (p. 54).

Additional information about this topic can be found on the websites of tour operators who include adoption homeland tours in their package tour offerings. Tourism students may benefit from efforts to enhance our understanding of the needs, desires, expectations and experiences of this particular, but growing, group of travellers. While the term “Adoption Homeland Tours” is known amongst tour operators, I am unaware of any academic literature presently existing which has examined the experiences of adult adoptees during adoption homeland tours from a phenomenological perspective. With this in mind, it is my intent to provide through this study a baseline understanding of the subject as understood through a phenomenological perspective and bring forward the term “Adoption Homeland Tours” to the academic community, specifically to the academic community concerned with tourism, for the first time. For the purposes of this study, Adoption Homeland Tours can be defined as travel taken by adoptees for the express purpose of exploring, seeking greater understanding and connection with their biological roots. My study will focus on the Adoption Homeland Tour experiences of adult adoptees rather than child adoptees.

My experiences taught me that adoption and adoption reunions are complex and can raise a multitude of emotions that often contradict each other. Often times the newfound sense of connection to my biological family has been sharply juxtaposed against the sense of confusion and loss that reunions can create. While I have not been a part of a formal adoption homeland tour, I have travelled to the Prairies and to the Rockies to see where my birth parents and their families were raised and to meet my extended family. Going on a homeland trip with my birth mother back to her parents’ home-towns had a profound effect on my sense of identity

and my understanding of who I am as an individual who is adopted and has met her birth family.

When I began graduate studies, I enrolled in the qualitative methods course required by the Department for completion of my degree. Part of my course work involved a poster presentation, which I chose to dedicate to adoption reunions as understood through a phenomenological lens. My work on this project required that I read many stories of adult adoptees who had reunited with their birth relatives. These stories resonated so strongly and deeply with me that a fellow student and friend encouraged me to dedicate my thesis research to the subject. Being a student of tourism, I began looking for research that illuminated the intersection between the two subjects: adoption and tourism. I found very little research. . It was at this point that my own journey as an adoptee sent me down the path to explore the journeys of other adoptees that had similarly set out to learn about their roots. I brought my own understandings and experiences with adoption reunions into my study and it is my hope that this understanding allowed me to approach my participants with sensitivity, empathy and respect for who they are and what they have experienced as adult adoptees.

Having had such dramatic and life-altering experiences with adoption reunions, my personal interest in this project has been to continue to learn about the experiences of adult adoptees who search to learn about their roots within the context of adoption homeland tourism. This study contributes to the existing literature about adoption reunions and adoption homeland tourism and I hope that tour operators, social workers, adult adoptees, adoptive families and birth families can gain a deeper and more detailed understanding of what it is like to be adopted and what it is like to participate in an adoption homeland tour experience.

To this end, the purpose of this research is to create a space where adoptees feel comfortable discussing the meaning of adoption homeland tours as well as the complexities of emotions and insights gained from these experiences.

I hope this study highlights aspects of the phenomenon that have not yet been brought to light and provides the tourism literature with phenomenological research that can be used to guide future studies using the same type of methodology. Additionally, I hope this study provides greater insight into an under-researched type of tourism, which may offer a form of support to adult adoptees desiring to learn about their roots.

To accomplish these goals, I used a qualitative, phenomenological inquiry guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What does being an adult adoptee mean to the participant?
- 2) What does the adoption homeland travel experience mean to the participant?
- 3) What, if any, insights did the experience provide for the adult adoptee?

## **PRE-SUPPOSITIONS AND PRE-UNDERSTANDINGS**

While introducing my study, it is important to explain where I, as the researcher, am coming from and what pre-suppositions and pre-understandings I brought into this study. As articulated by Dupuis in her writing on reflexive methodologies (1999), qualitative research is strengthened by transparency and sense of openness about the interconnection between the researcher's own thoughts, beliefs and ideas and the shape that the research process takes. As she writes in *Naked Truths: Towards a Reflexive Methodology in Leisure Research*:

*A reflexive methodology recognizes the researcher's connectivity with the world around her or him and involves the use of empathy throughout the research process. It embraces the direct incorporation of our own feelings into the analysis, using emotions and experiences documented in personal research journals to support or refute our initial assumptions or perspectives and to help us understand the lived experiences of others (Kleinman & Copp, 1993; Lather, 1986). It means asking ourselves how we felt*

*during different stages of the research and why we felt that way, identifying those aspects of the research that were difficult and those that were easy, and reflecting on the emotional issues raised throughout the research process and what those experiences tell us about the phenomenon under study (Kleinman & Copp, 1993; Krieger, 1991). It also means weaving those emotions and personal experiences into our writing to help make the phenomenon under study come alive for our readers (Dupuis, 1999, p. 60).*

## **OUTLINE OF THESIS**

This section provides an overview of the pertinent elements of my thesis. Chapter Two begins with a review of the tourism literature and then discusses the social work literature that represents the main aspects of adoption reunions to provide readers with a sense of the importance of exploring roots for adoptees. The social work literature had an important guiding role in my study as it was some of the only available literature relevant to my study and many of the key findings discussed in this literature figure prominently into the experiences of my participants and the essences of adoption homeland travel.

In Chapter Three, I discuss the logistical aspects of my study and provide an overview of methods and methodology. This chapter includes a detailed description of the study's purpose, methodology, role of the researcher, research goals, research questions, data collection, data analysis and data validation strategies. I also reflect on ethical considerations, limitations and the significance of the study.

Chapter Four provides the findings and discussion of my study which reveal the significance and implications of adoption homeland travel for adoptees, namely that adoption homeland travel addresses adoptees' questions and feelings about being adopted by providing insights and understandings about their roots.

Chapter Five provides a conclusion and recommendations for future research along with an overview of the significance of the study.



## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review covers various topics relevant to this study. The goal of this literature review is to provide a background and rationale for this particular study. Each of these sections is described in detail below. First, I present a discussion of literature on tourism niche markets, tourism motivations and adoption homeland tours to provide some context for a discussion of adoption searches and reunions. These topics are important to the study as they provide insight into the experience of adoption as well as types of tourism that are closely related to adoption homeland tourism. The literature review provides a background to adoption reunions and then moves into a discussion of adoption homeland tourism and other types of travel that are similar to adoption homeland tourism.

### **TYPES OF RELATED TOURISM**

Before beginning a discussion about adoptees' participation in tourism that reconnects them with their biological origins, understanding travel motivations and place attachment is essential. This discussion of travel motivations and place attachment will continue to build the framework for the discussion of adoption homeland tours and provide an understanding of the various types of tourism that involve some kind of a search for connection to family, heritage or roots. Adoption homeland tourism falls into this category as it involves a unique group of people who are searching to learn about their roots. "Legacy tourism" is one such related niche market as are "genealogical tourism", "diaspora tourism", "roots tourism", "heritage tourism" and "visiting friends and relatives tourism". Each is discussed in depth below in order to position the discussion of Adoption Homeland Tours and provide readers with an understanding of where this subject fits in a broader tourism research context. While Adoption Homeland Tourism has a lot in common with other types of travel discussed below, it

remains unique and distinct from other travel niche markets. To fully understand this, it is necessary that I provide an overview of these other tourism areas in order to illustrate how they are similar but yet very different. Each is discussed in the sections that follow.

**Travel Motivations.** While understanding *what* people do when they travel is important, understanding *why* they travel is equally important, especially for this research. The literature regarding research on travel motivations is extensive and covers a multi-faceted range of sub-topics. As Fodness (1994) noted, “While motivation is only one of many variables (e.g., perception, cultural conditioning and learning) that may contribute to explaining tourist behavior, it is nevertheless a critical variable because it is the driving force behind all behavior” (p. 555).

The travel motivations literature has many models and theories reflecting the efforts of researchers to capture the factors that drive travel behaviour. Early models of tourist motivations included simple approaches such as Crompton’s (1979) push-pull model or Shoemaker’s (1994) division of tourist motivations into three distinct categories. Crompton explained tourist motivations in terms of the factors at home that worked as forces *pushing* tourists towards the destination (e.g., job stress, inclement weather, etc.) and the factors at the destination that worked as forces *pulling* tourists to the destination (culture, good weather, history, destination image, etc.). However, Shoemaker’s approach to understanding motivations was to look at them as three separate categories: Get Away/Family Travelers, Adventurous Travelers or Gambler/Fun Travelers. More detailed approaches provide more specific types of motivations with as many as eighteen categories of motivations including education, relaxation, pleasure, romance, sports, culture, history, etc. (Lundberg, 1971). Other authors offer explanations as to what motivates tourists to travel in terms of destination image and the

different types of values that a destination may hold for a tourist, which entice him or her to travel there (see for example, Alhemoud & Armstrong, 1996; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Sirgy & Su, 2000). While many theories about travel motivations have been put forth into the realm of academia, there are so many variables which influence motivation and participation; it is difficult to condense into one simple statement why people choose to go on these trips. As Kleiber, Walker and Mannell discuss (2010), internal and external factors play a part in motivation as well as other factors. In Chapter four, we will hear how the participants in this study chose to participate in an adoption homeland tour because of their own desires to connect with their biological culture but also because of other people's desires for them to experience a connection with their biological culture. There is a complex relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as other factors like environment, socialization and constraints which all play a role in how an individual is motivated to participate or not participate in leisure activities, like tourism.

While this discussion of travel motivations is brief, it is included to illustrate research that attempts to delineate the factors that determine why people travel and to make the point that these issues are complex. In discussing adoption homeland tourism it is important to keep this in mind as an individual's motivation to participate in this type of travel may also be complex and depend upon a multitude of factors. It seems apparent that motivations for this type of travel connect to a desire for meaningful travel that focuses around an experience and a search for connection to roots and family. More discussion about motivations is included in Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion.

There are many types of travel for individuals to participate in and several that directly relate to adoption homeland travel because of the emphasis on learning about roots and culture through travel. One such type is called Legacy Tourism.

**Legacy Tourism.** Legacy tourism entails travel for the sake of pursuing knowledge about one's homeland and for learning more about the place from where one has descended. Extensive knowledge about legacy tourism has been provided in a study conducted by McCain and Ray (2003) in addition to work by Pinho (2008) and Gonzalez (2007). Legacy tourism is described by McCain and Ray as tourism that happens in order to, "engage in genealogical endeavors, to search for information or to simply feel connected to ancestors and ancestral roots" (McCain and Ray, 2003, p.713). They suggest further that individuals who participate in this form of tourism have "a personal connection with their heritage beyond a general relationship of collective ancestry" (p. 713). In other words, tourists who participate in legacy tourism do so because they desire a connection with their homeland that runs deeper than simply acknowledging that once upon a time their ancestors lived there. Instead, as recent research suggests, legacy tourists have a desire to feel tangibly connected to their homeland and to understand how aspects of the culture, language, landscape, food, music, etc. makes up a part of who they are (Pinho, 2008; McCain & Ray, 2003; Gonzalez, 2007).

Examples of legacy tourism can be seen at events like the 2001 sailing of seven ships from Esbjerg, Denmark to New York City, which was a re-enactment of the trip made by 85 000 Mormons who left Europe to sail to the United States 150 years ago (AP Worldstream, 2001; Sea Trek, 2001 Homepage). Birthright Israel brings individuals of Israeli descent, who have little or no experience with their homeland, back to Israel to foster a sense of connection between the tourist and their home country (Newland & Taylor, 2010, p. 5). With the same

intentions, Scotland hosted its first “Homecoming” event in 2009 and marketed it globally to individuals of Scottish descent, Scottish citizens and to “those who simply love Scotland” (Homecoming Scotland, 2009). The campaign invited individuals to come celebrate Scotland’s cultural and creative strengths and, for those with Scottish ancestry, to reconnect with their homeland (Homecoming Scotland, 2009). While Legacy tourism is not dependent upon organized events, packaged tours offered by organizations like Birthright Israel or the Scottish Tourism Alliance seem to work especially well as a means to facilitate this type of tourism.

**Genealogy Tourism.** Genealogy tourism is similar to legacy tourism, yet it focuses primarily on accessing records to piece together a family history. As Santos and Yan (2010) argue, genealogy tourism consists of, “amateur genealogists whom travel to destinations to make available resources that support family history research” (p.56). This niche market of tourism is described as being driven by a need to form a strong sense of one’s identity and to affirm, negotiate and maintain one’s identity (Basu, 2004; Yakel, 2004; Santos & Yan, 2010). Elsewhere in the literature, genealogy tourism is described as, “the ignition of a virtual outward journey and a real inward journey as family records are accessed and one learns about their genealogy” (Basu, 2004 as cited in Santos and Yan, 2010, p.58). Genealogical tourism can occur in the form of a visit to a specific place which holds genealogical significance to the tourist or by searching out historical records or genealogical information found in libraries, churches or historical societies (Santos & Yan, 2010, p.58).

Two of the largest genealogical collections in America are the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana and the Library of the Mormon Church in Utah (Santos & Yan, 2010, p.58). The Allen County Public Library sees over 400 000 visitors annually, many of whom line up before dawn to wait for a turn to go inside and seek out information

about their ancestors (McCain & Ray, 2003). Similarly, the Mormon Church Library contains one of the world's largest genealogical collections and works in conjunction with the Family History Center in Salt Lake City, which allows visitors to access over two billion names of deceased individuals (McCain & Ray, 2003; Shute, 2002).

**Roots Tourism.** Roots tourism refers to travel for the sake of learning about one's cultural history. The term is derived from the quest of African-Americans to find knowledge of their ancestors' dispersion as a result of the slave trade (Pinho, 2008). According to Pinho, the name "roots tourism" is linked to Alex Haley's well-known novel *Roots*, but also refers to "the strong connections between people and place" (p.72). Through roots tourism, African-Americans in particular, have the opportunity to gain a sense of both cultural and familial roots that were lost through colonialism and slavery (Pinho, 2008). Individuals who embark on roots tourism experiences often make use of packaged tours made available through travel agencies and they follow the itineraries set by these companies (Urry, 2002; Bruner, 1996; Finley, 2001). Popular roots tourism destinations include Ghana, Senegal, Brazil and Nigeria, which, as Pinho suggests, are "the places of origin . . . the place the ancestors left to face the horrors of the Middle Passage, 'the places to find preserved traditions'" (p.76).

**Diaspora Tourism.** Another related form of tourism is diaspora tourism. This term describes the act of travelling to return to one's homeland after being displaced from it previously (Newland & Taylor, 2010). While this type of travel can occur for many reasons and includes a variety of activities, its primary purpose is to allow tourists who have been dispersed from their homeland to return. This niche market typically involves two distinct types

of tourists: those who still have relatives living in the homeland upon whom they can call for food and lodgings during their stay, and those who have descended from the homeland but have no longer have neither additional ties nor the family resources to access while visiting (Newland & Taylor, 2010, p.4). Hughes and Allen's (2010) study focuses on diaspora and provides a great deal of insight into the significance of a Homeland and the role of Visiting Friends and Relatives tourism in relation to Homeland(s). Their discussion of diaspora and the Homeland encompasses many ideas which are intertwined through the discussion of Adoption Homeland Tours and enforces both the significance and complexities of these subjects:

Some ethnic groups will be a minority in any one country or place. This has particular relevance to the diaspora, an imprecise notion that has conventionally included elements of dispersion from a homeland, an on-going orientation towards it and a degree of separation with respect to the host-society (Brubaker, 2005). Those who have left 'the homeland' and are now living in a host community commonly regard, in varying degrees, homeland rather than the host as a source of identity and values (Hall, 1990). A consequence may be communities, especially second and subsequent generations, whose cultural or national identity is 'hyphenated' (Ali & Holden, 2006) or a 'hybrid' of several including that of origin (or ancestry) and host (Hickman, Morgan, Walter, & Bradley, 2005) (p. 2).

As Hughes and Allen articulate in this passage, the subject of diaspora connects directly to many themes such as dispersion, separation, and complex notions of identity and heritage, all themes that are present in discussions concerning Adoption Homeland Tours. Moreover, Hughes and Allen's work (2010) highlights the way that individuals separated from their homeland struggle to whole-heartedly accept the culture and values of the new host culture as their own. This struggle is also articulated by adoptees in their stories of what it is like to grow up within their adoptive families while feeling culturally disconnected from their homeland. Having said this, the subject of diaspora plays an important role in informing a discussion of Adoption Homeland Tours. While the term diaspora refers specifically to any group of people that has been dispersed outside its traditional homeland, especially involuntarily, and most-

often used to refer to people of Jewish or African ethnicity (www.merriam-webster.com), the concept shares underlying elements of separation, loss and removal from a cultural anchor with discussions of adoption found in social work literature. Additionally, diaspora literature affirms connections between Diaspora tourism and Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) tourism and implies that both types of tourism serve to affirm identity, both of which are ideas pertinent to a discussion of Adoption Homeland Tours. In discussing diaspora travellers' thoughts concerning their dispersion from the homeland, Hughes and Allen (2010) write:

*The initial migration was considered to be only temporary with intent to return to homeland at some stage. As a consequence, adjustment to host communities was invariably not full (in order to make return smoother), own culture was preserved and connections with homeland were maintained. Visits to the homeland have been one element of such connections – homeland was a key issue in travel and tourism decisions. In all cases, it was noticeable that informants, at least of the first generation, made and prioritised visits to country of origin. This was commonly identified as a special place, a homeland. This may be viewed as 'VFR' type of holiday, one of the conventional classifications of tourism by purpose: holidays, business, etc., but even for those who are ostensibly VFR, there may be underlying influences and meanings that relate to establishing or confirming identity (p. 3).*

In other words, the emphasis on homeland and reconnecting with family, culture and identity described in studies of Diaspora tourism has strong links to VFR tourism, both of which inform the study of Adoption Homeland Tours.

**Visiting Friends and Relatives Tourism.** As the previous section identified, Visiting Friends and Relatives tourism has strong ties to Adoption Homeland Tours and needs to be examined in order to adequately position this study. VFR tourism first gained recognition as a result of Jackson's (1990) publication, which critiqued the manner in which the tourism



industry had overlooked the significance of the visiting friends and relatives market. The result of this publication was a marked increase in the number of VFR related studies (Backer, 2008). VFR studies tend to be quantitative in nature and focus on the types of people who participate in this kind of travel tourism. They are generally concerned with the factors that influence individuals' decision to participate in VFR tourism, distinctions between domestic and international VFR tourism and the role of the destination's attractiveness in extending the length of the VFR trip (see for example, Hay, 1996; Hsieh, & O'Leary, 1995; Jackson, 1990; King, 1996; Morrison,; Paci, 1994; Seaton & Tagg, 1995).

It has been suggested that visiting friends and relatives is often only one of several motives for travel within the broader category of VFR. According to Moscardo, Pearce, Morrison, Green and O'Leary (2007): "VFR often is not the sole reason for travel but more often involves a combination of motives that, when pursued at a destination, result in participation in a variety of activities and not only VFR" (Moscardo *et. al.*, 2000, p.258). However, it is important to note that visiting friends and relatives tourism can act as both a motive for travel and as an activity to participate in while travelling (Moscardo *et. al.*, 2000, p.258). Differentiation between VFR as motive and VFR as activity is discussed thoroughly in the VFR literature (Hsieh & O'Leary, 1995; Jackson, 1990; King, 1996; Morrison,; Seaton, 1994). In a study of the characteristics of people who participate in this type of tourism, VFR was described as, "one of the most highly recognized activities pursued during touring" (Asiedu, 2008, p.609). Asiedu also describes VFR tourism as a market that, "denotes travelling with the major purpose of visiting friends and/or relatives and is one of the foremost tourism motivators or categories in tourism" (p. 609).

According to Moscardo *et al.*, (2000), types of travel that fall under the category of VFR may include attending significant family events such as weddings or birthdays, as an added part of a business trip, or to fulfill a, “desire to return to places of significance in a person’s own history” (p.251). This last type of VFR tourism, returning to a significant historical place, is of particular relevance for this study as adoption homeland tourism focuses largely on returning to places that are part of one’s history and origins. Stokowski (2002) explains how one’s “sense of place” can influence emotional attachment to physical space(s), an idea that is often referred to as “place-attachment”. In her own words:

*The concept of sense of place is used colloquially to refer to an individual’s ability to develop feelings of attachment to particular settings based on a combination of use, attentiveness and emotion. The very same setting can mean very different things to different individuals associated with it. Popular conceptions of place tend to be geographically-based, in that the sense of place tends to be drawn around and linked with a known physical setting—one’s home, an area in a park, a favorite shop or scene in town, and so on (p. 369).*

This idea of “sense of place” translates into discussions about Adoption Homeland Tour experiences and the importance that adoptees place on physically visiting their homeland and being present in the spaces and places where their cultural roots are found. Stokowski goes on to expound on the role that place plays in informing our interpretations and understandings of our experiences:

*The story of one’s life is always the story of one’s life in relation to others and in relation to the meaningful places created and contained in one’s surroundings. As Entriken (1996, p.217) explained, “Place and place identity reflect in part the narrative strategies we employ to regain a sense of wholeness, connecting self to milieu” (2002, p. 373).*

As Stokowski posits, place plays an essential role in helping individuals establish their sense of identity by providing them with a physical point of reference for meaningful experiences, in

other words, place provides the context which then informs how we interpret our interactions and experiences throughout life.

Additionally, Havitz's (2007) work on family vacations and visiting family during leisure and travel time provides important insights to the significance of place. Havitz's (2007) work highlights the important role that place plays during family vacations by suggesting that place lends context and significance to the insights gained, the stories shared and the insights taken away from the experience of family vacations. Havitz's later work (2008) relating to leisure, family vacations and place attachment elaborates on the important role that place plays in creating meaning. In *White Store on a Purple Highway: Hanging Out, Growing Up and Fitting In with Grandpa Keefer*, his recollections of family vacations in small-town Hannibal, WI, home to his grand-parents, provides a candid insight into the significant role place plays in understanding identity:

McAdams (1996) noted that "much of what is required to describe and understand the individual person is grounded in the person's culture and the socio-historical setting within which the person's life makes sense" (p.296). . . Hannibal's commercial heyday occurred in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a period spanning 30 to 60 years prior to my birth. Its two bustling railroads and depot were long gone, the Chautauqua site near Grandpa's store was a scrub-tree infested stone foundation, and its cheese factory and majority of once extant businesses had closed prior to my ever setting foot in the community. . .Speaking to a small town context, Hester (1990), p. 10) observed that not all places listed as sacred were striking, exotic, or quaint; they were, instead, "humble places . . . that provided settings for the community's daily routine" (cited in Stokowski, 2002, p.379). . . Paradoxically, I can truthfully and without hesitation confirm that Hannibal remains, for me, a more appealing destination than any of the broadly defined tourism hotspots comprising my worldwide evoked set (Havitz, 2008, pp. 4-5).

Similarly, Crouch's work on place-attachment as cited by Griffin's (2013) work on VFR tourism affirms the pivotal role that place plays in adding meaning to VFR experiences: "Interaction with place is also important, as physical environments provide

settings to establish both old and new connections, and become part of individual and group identity and culture (Crouch, 2000 as cited by Griffin, 2013, pp. 41-42). Griffin's (2013) work provides an excellent analysis of a more contemporary understanding of VFR tourism and his rationale for the importance of studying VFR tourism can be largely applied to the importance of studying Adoption Homeland Tours. Griffin's summary of studies providing context for his work on VFR tourism explains how a redefined notion of VFR tourism can encompass many tour experiences and according to his definition, adoption homeland may fall into this category:

*The VFR component is subsumed within a grander array of social meanings and understandings and is put in context of the specific relationships between people and place. The discussions offer a more insightful analysis into what sets VFR apart from other forms of tourism; indeed, the term 'VFR' is not routinely used, shifting the focus from motivations within a marketing friendly framework to the personal relationships. Larsen et al. (2007) suggest many tourism studies have "neglected issues of sociality and co-presence" (p. 245) and this re-conceptualization of VFR offers a more holistic view covering any tourism related experience that involves a prior personal relationship between resident and visitor, whether it be motivation, accommodation, a short visit during a trip, or any combination of these.*

These insights prove to be supported by my research and will be discussed further in Chapter Four. The subject of adoption tourism is interesting because visiting friends and relatives may be an obvious motive for this type of travel, yet following Moscardo *et. al.* (2000), visiting friends and relatives may be regarded as more of an activity that takes place during an adoptee's adoption tourism trip than a singular motive. It is interesting to note that only one participant included in my study viewed visiting friends and relatives during their adoption homeland tour as a significant motive for participation in an adoption homeland tour. The other participants were focused on connecting with culture rather than with actual biological relatives.

Each of the aforementioned niche markets within tourism implies marginally different motivations yet they are alike in the way that each focuses on either learning about one's homeland or returning to one's homeland to feel a sense of connection to a particular place. Many of these travelers possess characteristics and motivations that also speak to the adult adoptee's quest to return to their homeland and to seek out information about their biological family. For instance, an adoptee may engage in genealogy tourism to fill the need to find information about their history and determine where to continue searching. For the African-American adoptee who may have been raised in a pre-dominantly white family, roots tourism could provide the opportunity to gain insight into the African experience through tours, which guide visitors to the pivotal landmarks of African-American history. Finally, elements of diaspora tourism may fit with the adult adoptee's journey to learn about their homeland as this niche market captures tourists who journey home after they have been displaced from their homeland.

It seems that each of these types of tourism relate to adoption homeland tourism: tourism undertaken by adoptees in order to explore and reconnect with their roots, in the way that they all focus on a desire to find a connection to family and to one's personal history. Moreover, each of the aforementioned types of tourism seems driven by a desire for tourism experiences that are more meaningful and personal than mass tourism often tends to be. For example, Santos and Yan (2010) write that these types of tourism act as a form of self-discovery, "by locating the self within broader narratives of families, ethnicities and boundedness" (Santos and Yan, 2010, p.57). They also argue that as a whole, contemporary tourism, "becomes a reflexive response to a sense of loss that underpins modern society, assisting in reaffirming both a generational sense of the self and a self-recognition that one has

one's own perspective on the world" (p.57). The emphasis on meaning and experience, which is a central tenet of adoption homeland tourism, warranted the design of my study using a methodological framework that helped me to focus on unraveling the layers of meaning behind the experience and the ways participants live out these experiences.

While providing an overview of relevant literature, I felt it important to include a brief overview of some of the organizations currently offering adoption homeland tours for adoptees and their families. The testimonials provided by adoptees who participated in the formal package tours offered by these organizations are so powerful and moving that I felt they ought to be included to provide support for the incredible value and meaning of these tours for adoptees and to set the stage for Chapter Four.

## **ADOPTION TOUR ORGANIZATIONS**

**Always and Forever.** One Adoption Tour organization is "Always and Forever", and it is worth describing this organization in some depth here. Always and Forever is a U.S. organization that provides adoption homeland tours to families with children adopted from China (Always and Forever, 2011). The organization, which was founded by Michael Z. Han, has grown out of his work with various agencies that place babies from orphanages in China with families in the U.S. After ten years working to place children with families, Han began receiving numerous requests from adoptive families for cultural support, seeking to help their child understand the meaning of being Chinese-American. At this point, he began organizing adoption homeland tours for these families; thus the creation of "Always and Forever" (Always and Forever, 2011). The organization's mission statement reflects many qualities of legacy tourism. It states:

*Our mission is to connect adoptive families with their children's heritage. Through adoption homeland tours, we help the adoptive families experience the children's*

*culture of origin, discover their heritage, create positive memories of their birth country and build new friendships (Always and Forever, 2011).*

The organization offers many kinds of adoption homeland tours including group tours, themed tours and personalized tours (Always and Forever, 2011). The trips are advertised to offer reasonable rates compared to other similar organizations and take families back to the orphanages their children were adopted from and through age-appropriate activities allow adopted children to engage with local Chinese children to experience culture in a meaningful way (Always and Forever, 2011).

Testimonials on the websites of different companies offering adoption homeland tour packages illustrate the significance and meaning of these trips for both adoptees and their adoptive families alike. One tour participant wrote:

*We could not have asked for a better reception and experience!!! We were able to meet the foster mom and the lady who found my daughter. We visited the finding site. Everything about that day was better than I had expected. My daughter has grown up hearing about how great a country China is...but to be able to visit and learn about her birthplace and her country, to be able to eat the food (starfish included), smell the smells, mingle with the people, see the countryside of the birthplace, etc. is having a profound effect on her. She has always had a strong sense of self, but now she truly believes that she is "one of the chosen ones!" She loves her heritage, and is so proud to be Chinese (Always and Forever, 2011).*

While another family who had been a part of a homeland tour described their experience with great appreciation:

*THANK YOU! THANK YOU! THANK YOU! The trip was more than we EVER dreamt it could be! We found our daughter's discovery site - a bridge over a rice field and the man who found her!!! We had lunch with the new director of the orphanage and the former director whom our daughter used to call Grandpa. Folks there told us that probably the abandonment site would soon be gone, as a new road is being built there. Lots of old buildings have been abandoned and the town has moved in a different part of the area just since 1999. We are all SO thankful for this opportunity -- that you and your staff made happen. THANK YOU! (Always and Forever, 2011).*

The testimonials on these websites suggest just how meaningful these return trips are for the adopted individuals. Further, it seems they are not just vacations, but pivotal aspects of an adopted child's developing sense of belonging and identity. The statements made by adoptees and families who have experienced these reunions speak volumes about the bearing these trips have for adoptee's sense of gaining some connection to their birth parents and ancestors. For instance

*A heritage journey provides kids the opportunity to discover links, or connections, with their country of birth. For some, like Amy, these links are intangible. During her stay in Korea, she and her parents visited the clinic where she was born. While in the waiting room, 11 year old Amy flitted from one chair to the next pausing momentarily to sit in each one. Although her parents observed this behaviour as boredom, Amy later announced she had sat in the same chair as her birth mother. And indeed she had since she sat in each and every chair. She was connecting in a way that worked for her. I have often pondered that day for Amy, being so thankful that she was able and willing to share with her parents what might otherwise have gone forever unnoticed, an intangible connection cloaked in what seemed like disinterested behaviour. . . Other times the links are much more tangible and recognizable. For example, while in Peru, three girls sharing the journey each carried a plastic bag while visiting ancient ruins. As they boarded the bus one day, the guide noticed the bags were full of sticks, stones, bottle caps, and assorted other "finds". She asked the girls if they planned on taking home this "junk". Incredulously the girls replied, "Junk?!? These are pieces of our ancestors." Time and again, we have seen kids collecting soil from their birth country, bringing home bits and pieces of a country they want and need to stay connected with in order to move forward (The Ties Project, 2007).*

Though it is rare to have adoption records from developing countries with information as detailed as to list the birth parents' names, one individual included in Yngvesson's study (2003) did have detailed records like this and was able to locate her birth mother through the help of a trip organizer (Yngvesson, 2003, p.20). The account of her reunion with her birth mother paints a vivid picture of the bittersweet but life-changing experiences these adoption homeland tours may hold:

*The meeting with Clara's "mother from Chile" was held in the modest house of the woman who had cared for her eighteen years previously and was attended by Clara's cousins, a*



*half-sister, a nephew, and other extended kin, as well as by her adoptive mother and a social worker from SENAME. I was present at the meeting, to interpret for Clara and her birth mother. As they "cried themselves out together" and I leaned toward them to catch their whispered words, there was a kind of breathless silence. Clara's mother caressed her daughter's face and begged her forgiveness. I felt like the thinnest of membranes connecting the two women—linguistically, physically—and separating them from (joining them to) Clara's "Swedish mother," who stood nearby. I struggled to maintain my composure. Even the youngest children seemed to be suspended in the tension that caught us all up in this collective moment of recognition, in which Clara said she felt as though she were "more or less the same and yet not the same [as her birth mother], since she is mother to me and I am daughter to her (Yngvesson, 2003, p.20).*

It is impossible to condense a passage like that any further; however, this excerpt makes it evident that the adoption homeland tourism experiences are invaluable and hold great meaning for the adult adoptees that are able to participate in them.

## **ADOPTION REUNIONS AS A PHENOMENON**

There are various themes in the adoption literature in regards to adult adoptees who search to learn about their biological history whether through reunions with biological relatives or through adoption homeland tours. These themes provide shape to adoption reunions as a phenomenon as they illustrate parts of the experience that embody what it is like to have an adoption reunion. For instance, Curtis and Pearson (2010) have written about the experiences of adult adoptees who have reunited with their biological parents and how these reunions include a wide range of emotions, and highlight issues of sameness and difference between adoptees and biological relatives.

Furthermore, there is a great deal of published information about the experiences of biological mothers reuniting with their adopted child (Affleck & Steed, 2001; Feeney, Passmore, and Peterson, 2007; Harris, 1996; Muller, U., Gibbs, P., & Ariely, S.G. 2003; Passmore & Coles, 2009; Tieman, van der Ende & Verhulst, 2008) and how these reunions raise issues of affirmation and identity, belonging, culture and embodied emotionality. The

following areas of the literature review will provide an overview of these aspects of adoption reunions as a phenomenon to set the stage for the discussion of the essences in Chapter Four.

**Affirmation and Identity.** While some authors explain the desire of adoptees to search for information about their biological history as a natural curiosity or as a need to understand more about their biological family (Brodzinsky, 1990; Jones, 1997; Schechter & Bertocci, 1990), other authors go into greater detail and offer many explanations or motives for the search, which all relate to gaining a stronger sense of identity or personal affirmation. These explanations include “genealogical bewilderment” (Sants, 1964), “a need for information” (Schechter & Bertocci, 1990), “a need to reduce stigma” (March, 1995), and a desire to assure the birthparents of the adoptee’s well-being (Sachdev, 1992). In a study by Sachdev (1992) an adoptee described her need for connectedness with heritage as “fundamental to becoming a complete person” (p.58) and explained to the interviewer:

*If the person reading this has seen or read Roots and can understand Alex Haley’s satisfaction in finding his roots, you can understand what any adoptee goes through and what he or she feels. You cannot become a full person until you have the basics, that is, who you came from, what kind of family you belong to, and how big your clan is (p. 59).*

Sachdev’s study provides yet another example of how this phenomenon is characterized by gaining a sense of identity and personal affirmation in a second account of adoption reunions. A different adoptee explained “finding my birth Mom and learning about myself and my ancestors has been like reading my autobiography. It has given me a new identity for the first time in 30 years. I really know now who I am. It was particularly satisfying to find that I look like my cousin” (Sachdev, 1992, p.64).

In a study by Darongkamas and Lorenc (2010), the role that searches play in identity and affirmation is explained with support from Passmore’s (2004) study: “the search

can also help a person to build a more complete sense of identity: wanting to find out more about one's personal characteristics, or ascribing certain personal qualities to members of a previous generation" (Darongkamas and Lorenc, 2010, p.1024). Additionally, Feast and Philpot's UK study (2003) states that 77% of adoptees searching cited a need for a more complete sense of identity as a primary reason for searching. In Affleck and Steed's work, one adoptee, in describing the reunion with her biological family in lieu of meeting her deceased birth mother, wrote: "they have given me enough of my mother to allow me to connect with her. . . I have been changed forever; I now have a strong sense of self and can regard myself as a worthwhile person" (Affleck & Steed, 2001, p. 42). In short, an important aspect of the phenomenon of adoption reunions is that they hold great significance for the adoptee in terms of gaining a sense of identity and personal affirmation (Campbell, Silverman & Patti, 1991; Passmore & Chipuer, 2009; Sachdev, 1992).

**Sameness and Difference.** Another important aspect of understanding adoption reunions as a phenomenon are issues of sameness and difference and how these issues influence an individual's understanding of their identity as an adoptee. Attachment theory, one of the theories suggested as an explanation for why adoptees search, postulates that adoptees' knowledge that they are not biologically connected to their adopted family may cause problems in terms of forming meaningful relationships with others later in life, thus motivating them to seek out their biological family or to visit the country from which they are descended (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Shaver, Collins, & Clark, 1996; Weiss, 1991). According to this theory, it is the presence of difference within the adopted family that urges adoptees to search for those who may be the same as them. A different approach to understanding why adoptees may wish to explore their roots is found in Kleiber, Walker and Mannell's (2011) Social

Psychology of Leisure text which explores the relationship between identity and leisure experiences. They posit that individuals need a sense of both affiliation and differentiation from others while establishing their sense of identity. In their words: “Being like others brings the sense of being part of a collective, but it is meaningful to identify only where that collective is distinguishable from others. The need to be connected is satisfied within groups, while the need to be distinctive is satisfied in intergroup comparison” (Kleiber, Walker and Mannell, p. 223). It is possible that adoptees have ample opportunity to feel distinctive from groups yet seek further opportunities to feel connected with groups and adoption homeland tourism or adoption reunions may satisfy this desire.

In a study by Campbell, Silverman and Patti (1991), one respondent reported that finding someone like her made the reunion experience entirely worthwhile. She explained that “I was looking for a personality similar to mine and a look-alike mother image” (Campbell et. al., p.332). Another respondent of this same study supported this sentiment when she reported that her reunion was very positive because she found she was just like her birth mother “I knew my birth mother and she, me. We looked just alike. This alone was wonderful” (Campbell et. al., p.333).

The literature on parent-child reunions suggests that differences in values, personality traits, interests, and expectations all played influential roles as to whether the reunion with a biological parent was a positive experience (Affleck & Steed, 2001; Feeney *et al*, 2007; Passmore & Coles, 2009;). In many cases, discrepancies between adoptee expectations and biological parent expectations played a significant role in terms of whether the reunion led to an ongoing relationship or whether contact was ended after a short period of time (Modell, 1997; Muller, Gibbs & Ariely, 2003; Sachdev, 1991). In this regard, sameness and

difference between adoptees and biological relatives can have a profound impact on the outcome of the reunion experience and participants expressed this idea as well to me. Chapter Four will provide further discussion of this idea.

Studies focusing on international adoptions note that issues of difference are more pronounced in international adoptions and this often spurs adoptees on to search for information to experience aspects of sameness (Juffer, 2006; Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, Gunnar & the Minnesota International Adoption Project Team, 2006; Tieman, van der Ende and Verhulst, 2008). Several studies of international adoptions note these differences are more apparent than differences noted by domestic adoptees and may encourage international adoptees to search to find relatives who are more like them in physical appearance, interests, inherent talents or abilities (Juffer, 2006; Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, Gunnar & the Minnesota International Adoption Project Team, 2006; Tieman, van der Ende and Verhulst, 2008).

**Belonging and Culture.** As previously mentioned, issues of sameness and difference are an important aspect of the phenomenon in question. In connection to questions of sameness and difference, questions of belonging and culture are also important elements of adoption searches as a phenomenon. To be more specific, issues of difference amongst international adoptees often present themselves as individuals adopted internationally begin to work through questions of belonging and culture. As the authors of one study of how questions of culture and ethnicity are worked through by international adoptees explain, “young, transracially adopted children tend to have a stronger sense of ethnicity than either non-adopted children of color or adopted children in same-race families. However, despite being proud of their birth heritage, many adopted children are uncertain about their race” (Friedlander, Larney, Skau, Hotaling, Cutting and Schwam, 2000, p.188).

**Emotionality.** Studies focusing on the actual experience of reunions between adult adoptees and biological parents found both satisfying and unsatisfying aspects of the reunion for many adoptees (Curtis & Pearson, 2010; Passmore & Chipuer, 2009; Sachdev, 1992). In-depth interviews undertaken with adult adoptees who described their reunion experiences revealed both elements of intense happiness associated with the initial meeting and physical reunion as well as elements of physical pain and heartache associated with disappointment, rejection or loss (Affleck & Steed, 2001; Passmore & Coles, 2009; Verrier, 1993). One adoptee who reunited with her birth mother but lived halfway around the world explained “I used to get these big knots in my stomach, my whole body would just scream out for her, very painful. I would try any devious means I could to get to Perth or for her to come to me. Yes, physical closeness was vital and it was depriving to not have it. And it physically hurt” (Affleck & Steed, p.45).

In a similar manner, recent research indicates adoptees who had never experienced their native culture reported the same kinds of highs and lows when returning to their homeland. Positive aspects of the reunion with their homeland included finally feeling a sense of belonging or achieving an understanding of what was lacking during childhood, while simultaneously feeling a sense of loss for the time spent away from their place of origin (Juffer, 2006; Lee, Grotevant, Hellerstedt, Gunnar, & the Minnesota International Adoption Project Team, 2006).

## **SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW**

Adoption homeland travel in and of itself is an intriguing and little-understood human experience, especially within tourism studies. The literature suggests adult adoptees search for information about their roots because of a desire to answer questions about their

genealogy or to feel connected to something. Tourism discussed in this literature review reflect elements of searching for connection to family history, yet adoption homeland travel offers this connection to roots and family history to adoptees who may not have the ability to explore their genealogy due to lack of information yet want to connect with their biological culture in a tangible way by physically returning to their homeland. One might ascertain from the discussion of why adult adoptees search for information about their roots and the different types of tourism that offer insight into roots that adoption homeland tourism provides a logical avenue for exploration. Adoption homeland travel offers adult adoptees and their families highly personalized tour experiences that endeavour to provide a connection and understanding of their roots. This study's emphasis on how participants experience these tours and what the tours mean to them provides further insight into why adoptees search for information about their roots and how their tour experiences appeal to this desire for information. This may help the academic community understand an important aspect of the travel experience which is the meaning that the experience holds for participants. At this point, I will turn the discussion over to the methodological approach chosen in order to best accomplish this goal.

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODS/METHODOLOGY**

This chapter presents the fine details of this study and provides a justification for choices that I have made regarding how the research was carried out. Included in this chapter are the purpose statement, research questions, methods of data collection and analysis, the research methodology that I used to shape the study as well as ethical considerations that are part of this approach. Last, I discuss the significance of the study. Ultimately, this chapter is intended to provide an overview of the study to explain the rationale for the chosen methodology and to provide a detailed description of how the study was conducted and why.

#### **PURPOSE**

As noted in the introduction, the purpose of this research is to create a space where adoptees feel comfortable discussing the meaning of adoption homeland tours as well as the complexities of emotions and insights gained from these experiences. It is my hope that my personal experience with adoption homeland travel and the nature of the phenomenological inquiry created a space where adoptees felt comfortable discussing the meaning of adoption homeland travel as well as the complexities of emotions and insights gained from these experiences.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research questions that guided my study are:

- 1) What does being an adult adoptee mean to the participant?
- 2) What does the adoption homeland travel experience mean to the participant?
- 3) What, if any, insights did the experience provide for the adult adoptee?

#### **METHODOLOGY**



This study is situated within a qualitative framework and was guided by hermeneutic phenomenology. According to Creswell (2007):

Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participants' setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible structure. Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honours an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of the situation (p.4).

As the purpose of the study was to understand the meaning of adoption homeland tours for adult adoptees, qualitative research, and particularly, hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry was the most appropriate research stance. Following the work of Gadamer (1960/1998) on Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a lens for data analysis, hermeneutics is described by Laverly (2003) as “a process of co-creation between the researcher and participant, in which the very production of meaning occurs through a circle of readings, reflective writing and interpretations” (p.30).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology was the most appropriate approach for investigating this topic because those working within this methodology endeavour to gain insights and understandings into the meanings of participants' experiences through an interpretive framework. According to van Manen (1997), the purpose of phenomenology is to “try to grasp the essential meaning of something” (p.77). Furthermore, van Manen states, “the insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience” (p.77).

In Amedeo Giorgi's writings on phenomenology he argues that the search for the essential meaning or essence of something “is the articulation, based on intuition, of a

fundamental meaning without which a phenomenon could not present itself as it is” (Giorgi, 1997, p.242). Following this, Kivel and Klieber (2000) have described phenomenology this way:

Phenomenological inquiry focuses on this question: “what is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?” Phenomenologists focus on how we put together the phenomena we experience in such a way as to make sense of the world and, in so doing, develop a worldview. There is no separate (or objective) reality for people. There is only what they know their experience is and means (p.219).

In terms of understanding phenomenology as it has been used in tourism studies, Pernecky and Jamal (2010) write:

In tourism studies, it has served as a theoretical avenue towards describing or understanding the experiential, and lived existence of tourists/guests, locals/hosts, service providers and any other stakeholders that take part in the tourism phenomenon. . .It does not merely call for an account of things we see in the world (e.g. book, bus, airplane) but shifts the focus to our “seeing” of objects and the world (Cerbone, 2006), and the meanings they hold (e.g. the experience of reading a book on travel writing, driving to a holiday destination, traveling to it by bus, or flying there) (p.1056).

In order to explore the adoptee’s experience and fully grasp the meaning of the adoption homeland tourism experience, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was necessary because it considered not only the parts or essences of the phenomenon but also the meaning of the phenomenon as a whole. Prevalent themes in the data were as important as understanding how those themes come together in an all-encompassing whole, which makes explicit to the reader or observer the meaning of an adoption homeland trip. Circling through the layers of understanding and meaning through the use of my own reflexive journals, the interview process and finally arriving at an understanding of the essences and the whole of these experiences brought me to a final understanding of the phenomenon through a process set out by other

phenomenologists (van Manen, 1997, p.77). I reflect more on the role of hermeneutic phenomenology in this study below.

## **ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER**

My role in this collection of data was as interviewer and my role as a researcher was known (Creswell, 2009, p.179) to the participants during the research process as I conducted face-to-face interviews. In this study, I endeavored to take a step back from the traditional role of interviewer in order to join the conversation with the participant in order to co-create meaning and understanding as two individuals who had both participated in adoption homeland travel rather than as interviewer and interviewee, we were two people with similar experiences, sharing with each other. The participants were made aware of the study prior to their confirmation of participation and their privacy and personal comfort remained a priority.

## **RECRUITMENT**

Recruitment involved working through several adoption homeland tourism agencies that made tour participants aware of the study. In order to gain permission to collect data and speak with participants concerning an adoption homeland tour, I was required to work with a gatekeeper from these adoption homeland tourism organizations who played a direct role in managing and conducting the tours. Working with an agency provided me with assistance in connecting with potential participants by including a letter or flyer for participants in their regular tour booking information package. This was a great asset as participants were difficult to locate without any additional outside help. In order to convey to the participants my interest in the study and my experience with adoption homeland tourism, my recruitment letter included a more personal letter outlining my adoption story in the hopes that participants would feel that the interview would provide a safe space within which they could share their stories. If

respondents were interested in participating they were able to contact me at their own convenience. The recruitment process seemed to take on a bit of a snowball sampling approach as I began speaking with adoption tour organizations. It turned out that none of their previous clients were able to work with me as many of the clients were parents who had taken their elementary school aged children on tours; however, these clients did contact me and say that they knew of someone else who might be interested in participating and that they would pass on my recruitment letter and information to these acquaintances. In the end, all of my participants were acquaintances of previous adoption homeland tour clients rather than individuals who had dealt directly with the tour companies.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

**Interviews with Participants.** Data collection took place in one stage and involved active interviews. The interviews occurred after participants returned from an adoption homeland tourism experience. The sampling strategy was purposive and only adult adoptees who had participated in an adoption homeland tourism experience were included in the study. My goal was to conduct interviews with approximately 4 – 6 participants, though the final sample size of 5 was determined by the willingness of participants to take part in the study and my confidence that the data from the participants was thick and rich and embodied the hermeneutic circle of phenomenology. I concluded the interview portion of the study when I was certain that I had spoken to as many participants as were willing to speak to me and that I had detailed, in-depth, thorough conversations with these participants, which provided me with enough data to provide insight into the essences of their adoption homeland tour experiences. Ultimately, only four participants' were used in the study as one participant decided to

withdraw from the study after data collection ended as she expressed that she had changed her mind about her comfort level with being included in the study.

Interviews were active and the structure of the interview was co-constructive and focused on meaning-making. In the words of Holstein and Gubrium (1995), “the objective is not to dictate interpretation but to provide an environment conducive to the production of the range and complexity of meanings that address relevant issues, and not be confined by predetermined agendas” (p.17). Active interviewing allowed the participants to speak freely about their experiences and to share their own interpretations of the meaning of their experiences. I found this approach worked really well for this study, especially given my own perspective as an adoptee. Since participants were aware that I was also adopted and had made a trip back to my homeland, they would often pose my questions back to me. The ability to share our individual experiences with each other along with numerous “me too!” moments where either the participant or I would realize that we had many of the same thoughts or experiences either growing up as an adoptee or during our adoption homeland travel and this allowed for the meaning-making and co-construction of ideas to occur. With the consent of the participants, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for data analysis in order to accurately record participant responses.

## **DATA ANALYSIS/DATA EXPLORATION**

**Reflexivity and Memo-Writing during Data Analysis.** During the interviewing process, I made use of memo writing and reflexivity to keep detailed notes about the conversations held with participants during the interview process. The use of reflexivity was significant for this study since I am also an adult adoptee. As Creswell (2009) explains, reflexivity and memo-writing are helpful in exploring any biases, presuppositions, personal

opinions or understandings that I may have had about adoption as I worked through the participants' own experiences as they related them to me through their stories. Moreover, as outlined in the work of Dupuis (2009) and building on the works of several others as cited by Dupuis, reflexivity helped me to pull out my own experiences and ideas about what it is like to be an adoptee and to experience an adoption reunion tour into the sphere of meaning-making and understanding alongside the participants' experiences. Dupuis writes:

*A reflexive methodology demands the conscious and deliberate inclusion of the full self (i.e., the researcher self and the human self) throughout the research process (Daly, 1992b). This involves continuous, intentional, and systematic self-introspection (Daly, 1992a) beginning before we ever enter the field or begin data collection and continuing throughout the writing of our stories. . . A reflexive research methodology means making personal experiences, belief systems, motivations, and tensions as well as political agendas explicit and continually assessing the impact those factors may be having on the work we are doing (Fraser, 1993). (Dupuis, 1999, p.60)*

Additionally, the reflexive process supported and encouraged the collaborative, co-constructive nature of active interviewing and hermeneutic phenomenology. Participants shared their personal thoughts and ideas about the phenomenon and I shared my reflexive self and together I feel that we have arrived at an understanding of the essences of the phenomenon. As Dupuis explains:

*A reflexive research methodology recognizes the active, collaborative role that both the participants and researchers play in the meaning-making process and demands a move towards the notions of active interviews described by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) and experiential or participative research. Such research recognizes the importance of developing extended, trusting relationships in qualitative research and explicitly incorporates self-disclosure on the part of the researcher throughout the research process. A reflexive methodology also more directly incorporates the participants in interpretations of the data and in construction of our grounded theories, what Lather (1986) referred to as "dialogic research designs" (Dupuis, 1999, p.60).*

**The role of hermeneutic phenomenology in data analysis.** Data analysis used a phenomenological lens as I sought to understand the essences of the lived experiences of

adoption homeland tourism experiences as described by participants. Using this lens to explore the data meant paying particular attention to the words that the participants used to describe their experiences and how the meaning the participants attached to the experience shaped how they felt on the trip, how time passed during the trip or how the trip made them feel in their body. Focusing on these aspects of their stories and allowing them to tell their own story rather than directing them throughout the interview process allowed the interview process to remain true to the methodology. It was also critical for me to ask the participants to explain why they chose to tell a certain story and to interpret it for me so that the role of interpretation remained in their own hands and so that the interpretation stayed true to their experience as they understood it.

In order to ensure that the essences of the felt experience of adult adoptees were accurately understood and conveyed through the discussion, strategies for data analysis set out by Gadamer and van Manen were used in order to stay true to the methodology. Initially, data were analyzed using a multi-level approach that incorporated holistic, selective and detailed approaches as set out by van Manen (1997, p.94). The holistic approach seeks to look at the various aspects of the subject as a whole in order to understand the many elements of the subject, which together embody the meaning of the subject in its entirety. An example of how I used the holistic approach in my data analysis is provided below in an excerpt from one of my reflexive journal entries:

*As I finish coding each individual transcript I see the same themes or hints at themes coming up again and again but as obvious as they are I still find myself struggling to make sense of everything as a whole. Questions, identity, difference, connection, belonging, it's all there, but together as a whole what does it mean? What are my participants collectively trying to say about what adoption homeland tours mean? What shape are the essences trying to form as a whole? I think the strongest thread holding it all together is an innate need for connection with ourselves and with each other. When we do not know what our roots are or where*

*they lie, it is as if an invisible anchor essential for grounding us, for providing us with the context we need to understand ourselves is decidedly lacking.*

In other words, the holistic approach seeks to understand the meaning of the data as a whole, with all the parts of the subject understood as a collective.

The selective approach seeks to identify and consider any sections or phrases in the data that resonate with the purpose and research questions guiding the study or capture the essence of the reunion experience in a few sentences. For example, I found a passage from one participant's transcript particularly resonated with the research question "What, if any, insights did the experience provide for the adult adoptee?" This same participant shares the story of observing his relatives cooking food over an open fire in the hills of Jamaica and how his unexpected enjoyment of the simplicity of that lifestyle revealed to him a part of him he wasn't previously aware of:

*being open to experiencing that didn't diminish who I was becoming on my own and it made me realize that just because I was adopted didn't mean that I didn't have a connection to something; rather, it meant that I wasn't in it alone, it gave me the sense of belonging to something that I didn't have before*

Finally, the detailed approach seeks to understand the data by reading each sentence or line of data individually and then asking questions such as "what does this line or sentence tell me about the adoption homeland tour experience?" For example when I read the following line from a different participant's transcript: "I didn't realize that I had maybe, abandonment issues with my birth father because you never quite feel like you belong to your biological, like you're never quite..." I coded beside it: "complex emotions, she feels like she doesn't quite belong wholly to either set of parents, new emotions surfacing".

Using a multi-level approach to data analysis contributed to gaining a deeper, richer, fuller perspective of the subject. After looking at the data on these three levels, I focused



on the significance of ideas that were noticeably different from the major themes or that were less prominent but still important (Creswell, 2009, p.218).

The hermeneutic approach played an important role in my data collection and analysis. As Koch (1995) stated, “Hermeneutics invites participants into an ongoing conversation, but does not provide a set methodology. Understanding occurs through a fusion of horizons, which is a dialectic between the pre-understandings of the research process, the interpretive framework and the sources of information” (Koch, 1995, p.835). This was apparent as I looked back at my reflexive journals after data collection was complete and saw how my initial ideas about adoption homeland travel evolved throughout the interview process as I gained new perspectives from my participants and returned back to the relevant literature to sift through it and determine what remained relevant to my study. Certain subjects seemed to strike a stronger chord with participants and spur the conversation to take on greater depth and richness of detail. Being able to speak freely with the participants and share my own feelings about what it was like to meet my birth family and realize that my “quirks” were actually “connections” with them or what it was like to see how my birth parents interacted with my biological half-siblings and reflect on what a childhood with my biological parent(s) might have been, triggered personal anecdotes from my participants about their own similar experiences that I don’t think I would have heard otherwise.

It was important for me to use my familiarity with what it is like to be adopted in order to be empathetic and respectful of the participants while focusing on the *participants’* experiences on the tour, and *not my own*. However, while it was important to me that I remain focused on the stories the participants had to share, I found myself time and time again nodding my head in agreement, feeling that leap of excitement in the pit of my stomach as I heard my

inner voice screaming “Yes! Me too! I know *exactly* what you’re talking about!” while the participants recounted their tour experiences. Almost with a certain sense of poeticism, I sat listening to them and felt as if in that moment I was within the hermeneutic circle. These moments created a perfect opportunity to share parts of my own homeland travel experiences with the participants and to have a dialogue that used my self-disclosure to build trust with my participant, such as “so you experienced this, I experienced this too, here’s my story, this is what that experience meant to me, what did that experience mean for you?”

The interviews allowed adoptees to share their adoption homeland tour stories and their meanings with me after some time had passed and they were able to reflect back on what different aspects of the tour meant to them. The hermeneutic circle played a guiding role in this process as the participants and I worked through the meanings of their experiences and how they interpret their experiences alongside my own shared experiences and my interpretations of them. Listening to stories that represented the meaning of the trip to them and then asking why they chose to share that story and then sharing one of my own experiences and my own interpretation of that experience opened up the conversation to share experiences and interpretations of the adoption experience. After participants shared a story and its meaning with me, I would try to restate what I thought they were conveying to me to see if I was getting an idea of their experiences that was really true to the meaning they were trying to convey. In other words, the hermeneutic circle allowed me as the researcher to bring the participants’ voices to the forefront of this study and to allow their own interpretations of homeland travel experiences to guide the path to discerning the shape and the essence of adoption reunion tours as a phenomenon. Together, we seemed to arrive at a mutual understanding of the aspects of the phenomenon which were most poignant and pivotal. Midway through my data collection, I

visited my grand-parents' graves in Stony Plain and had my own, second, adoption homeland travel experience. I then continued on with data collection and really began to see how the hermeneutic circle was taking form in my study through the ongoing internal dialogue between my pre-understandings, interpretations of the phenomenon and the insights I was gaining from the data.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The University of Waterloo's *Office of Research Ethics* provided approval of the study prior to my entering the field. Primary ethical considerations included: a) respecting participants' privacy and confidentiality and b) discussing a sometimes taboo and often delicate subject with respect and dignity towards participants. In order to do this I made sure participants knew that they could withdraw from the study at any time should they have felt uncomfortable continuing. I also conveyed to participants that they did not need to disclose or share any story they felt uncomfortable sharing. Only adult adoptees were included in the study as they are legally considered adults and including minors in a study of a delicate nature would have posed additional ethical concerns. Transcripts from the interviews were kept secure in my office on campus to protect the privacy and anonymity of all participants. Pseudonyms were used in place of participants' and organizations' actual names in order to conceal their identity and protect their privacy. Additionally, all data were kept in a locked office at the University of Waterloo and will be destroyed after a period of 3 years in order to protect confidentiality and privacy. The results and discussion of the study were made available for the participants to review in case they wanted to provide feedback or clarification prior to the study being made publicly accessible. I did not receive any requests to change or reword anything, the only

feedback I received was that they thought I had shared their stories accurately and looked forward to reading the finished document.

## **LIMITATIONS**

There were several limitations to this study. As a result of this topic being under-researched, there were few examples to draw on for a basis or framework to guide this study. The literature I used to frame this study was drawn from several areas, which seemed to connect to my topic in some capacity. While in some ways this was beneficial as it allowed me to take the study in one of several directions, it was also limiting as it was difficult to find a place within the literature to firmly situate my study. Finally, the most significant limitation is that my sample size is small as I found it incredibly difficult to find participants willing to be involved in the study given that the subject is quite personal.

The following chapter will discuss the findings and a thorough discussion of their implications along with recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

*It was missing a piece.  
And it was not happy.  
So it set off in search  
of its missing piece.  
And as it rolled  
it sang this song  
-Oh I'm lookin' for my missin' piece  
I'm lookin' for my missin' piece  
Hi-dee-ho, here I go,  
Lookin' for my missin' piece.  
-Shel Silverstein, The Missing Piece*

My study began with five people (one of whom later withdrew from the study): Lily, Madelaine, Sanika, Romain and Margi, all of whom were adopted as infants and travelled back to their homeland later in life, as adults. Every person included in my study made the journey back to their homeland with a family member and each of them went about their tour in a slightly different way. Madelaine, a woman in her early thirties made the trip back to her homeland with her spouse and stayed with her birth relatives while she was there. Madelaine was unique in the fact that her “homeland” was actually only a few hours away from the city where she was raised. Unlike the other participants included in the study, she was adopted domestically and raised in the country where she was born. Madelaine’s only sibling, a brother, was also adopted as an infant but has never expressed an interest in learning about his roots. Madelaine and her husband organized the entire trip themselves and her birth relatives acted as their travel guides while they were on their trip.

Sanika, a woman in her late twenties, was also adopted as an infant when she was a few weeks old. Her parents were Mennonite missionaries from Canada working in Bangladesh. Her parents decided that they wanted to adopt a girl from Bangladesh after working there for a few years. After Sanika’s adoption was finalized, she and her parents

moved back to Canada, where she was raised and now lives. Sanika was able to participate in a homeland tour when her father entered a contest offered by an airline. He wrote about how he always dreamed of taking his daughter back to her homeland to see where she was born. When he won the contest and free airfare for his family, Sanika was able to travel to Bangladesh with her parents and brother to see the orphanage where she was born and meet the woman who found her and took care of her prior to her adoption. She and her family were assisted by a tour guide while they were in Bangladesh.

Romain, an only child in his early thirties was the only man involved in the study. He was adopted as an older infant by parents of the same ethnicity and made the trip back to his birth-place, Jamaica, with both of his adoptive parents. Romain's trip back to Jamaica was organized by his adoptive parents in conjunction with a Jamaican tour guide who was able to take Romain and his family to the place where he was born.

Margi was adopted from India as an infant. Her younger sister was also adopted as a baby from India although they are from different parentage. She and her sister were raised by their single-mother, who took Margi back to India to experience her native culture when Margi was in her late teen years. Margi's sister was uninterested in returning to India and chose not to participate in the tour. Margi's tour experience was the most formal of all the participants. It was arranged through a tour company specializing in adoption homeland tours and the entire trip was oriented around taking Margi to places of personal significance while she was in India, including the orphanage where she was adopted and the districts of Calcutta where her parents would have been from (based on information in her adoption records).

Each of the four participants' tours was highly individualized in the way that they decided to take a tour, the way the tour was arranged, the people they took the tour with and the

kinds of insights that were gained from their tour experience. No two tours were exactly the same and while there are recurring themes throughout the stories they shared about their tours, the themes seemed to resonate with each person in a different way. This becomes clearer in the discussion below.

As I listened to each participant share the story of their journey with me I heard four different stories of individuals who felt a void in their life due to the unanswered questions about their identity, their desire to know where they came from and the sense of difference that permeated their lives. The void in Madelaine's life was expressed as she talked about feeling lonely growing up in a family of loud, extroverted individuals while she was intensely shy and reserved. Romain talked about how not knowing his true identity caused him so much emotional unrest that he struggled to feel comfortable dating people in case he might be related to them. Similarly, Margi's questions about her identity and feelings of difference surfaced primarily when she was in situations where she had to interact with people from her homeland. Her inability to speak to other Indian people in Hindi created a heightened sense of disconnection and difference from her Indian roots. For Sanika, the desire to return to her homeland to find answers to questions about her identity and biological culture was not her own; rather, it was her parents' desire that she return to Bangladesh to learn more about who she was and where she had come from. Sanika later explained that while it was her parent's desire for her to return to her homeland that initially led her back to Bangladesh, she realized later in life how important that trip was to give her a more complete sense of self, something that she hopes to continue to develop and share with her fiancé and maybe her children one day. While the "missing pieces" became evident in different ways for each individual, they all

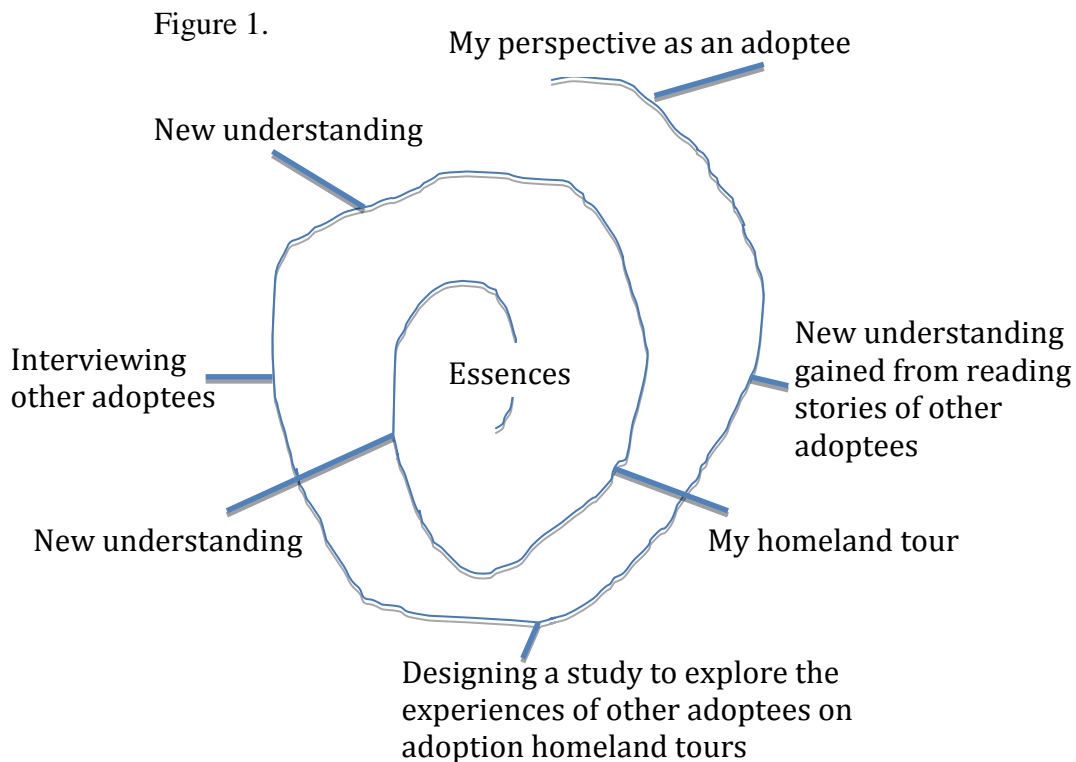
shared a need to return to their homelands in order to reconnect with their roots and fill in those missing pieces.

Reflecting back upon the course of events that led me to studying this phenomenon, I see the hermeneutic circle winding its way through my own story and the stories of the participants. I see the hermeneutic circle bringing everything to a place where I can see adoption homeland tourism in a broader, deeper, multi-layered way. I now see that the essences I arrived at have been informed by my own experiences, the experiences conveyed throughout the relevant literature and the experiences of my participants as they shared them with me. This reflection has been a constant process as I have worked to complete this study and I will try to illustrate throughout this chapter by providing excerpts from a reflexive journal.

In keeping with Dupuis' (1999) recommendations to incorporate reflexivity into qualitative research and in order to stay true to hermeneutic phenomenology, I have kept a reflexive journal from the onset of this study, which I used to capture my thoughts, reactions and musings about the ideas that have surfaced from the literature and from my participants' stories to make use of the hermeneutic circle. As I shared in my introduction, my own need to search for my roots led me to begin this journey nearly ten years ago. My reunion with my birth relatives and the subsequent trip to the Prairies to meet my extended biological family have influenced the strong sense of connection and resonance I experienced as I read other reunion stories while preparing my qualitative research project at the start of my graduate program. It was that project that led me to pursue this study, which triggered a chain of events that brought me to my own, second, informal adoption tour experience in rural Alberta during my data collection in the winter of 2013. This sequence of events, from my own adoption to the conclusion of this study is a living illustration of the hermeneutic circle at work.



I have included the diagram below to provide a visual aide to clarify what I mean by this.



As you can see in the diagram, I arrived at an understanding of the essences after going through an ongoing, circular process which moves continually through increasingly deeper levels of understanding, interpretation and meaning making until it is evident how the parts of the phenomenon come together to create the whole. In other words, understanding of the essences, which comprise the phenomenon, is a result of the constant process of experience, interpretation and new understandings, which occur on deeper and richer levels as the process continues. Each of the individual aspects of the phenomenon is necessary and needed for if any one of them were to be removed, the understanding of the phenomenon as a whole would be

altered or rendered incomplete. For example, had I never made the journey to Stony Plain to see my grandparents' graves I may have never understood the importance of connecting with roots through place.

This diagram illustrates the hermeneutic approach, which places importance on understanding the whole of the phenomenon as well as the parts, or essences of which it is comprised. This diagram also helps clarify the hermeneutic approach to understanding which builds upon pre-understandings (e.g., my perspectives as an adoptee, my first reunion with my biological family, etc.) which led to a focus on the details of the essential structures of a phenomenon, thus illuminating and creating a new, deeper and richer understanding of the whole. I suggest that this study follows the hermeneutic approach in the way that it worked through this process as instead of being a linear path to understanding, new understandings are achieved as we continually delve deeper into layers of insight, illumination, interpretation and meaning through an examination of both the parts and the whole.

As I identify in my reflexive journal entry, my own impromptu homeland tour experience during my trip out west for data collection highlighted elements of homeland tours that were prominent in the stories my participants shared with me about their own adoption homeland tour experiences. I have come to see these highlighted elements as essential structures or what I will continue to refer to as essences, of the experiences of adult adoptees during travel to their homeland. My identification of these essences occurred after data collection ended and I had spent many hours transcribing, coding, journaling, reflecting and pondering the meaning behind all of the stories that had been shared with me. While so much of what my participants shared with me mirrored thoughts and emotions that I had experienced personally, such as the persistent questioning, internalizing others perceptions of my difference

from them, a desire to return home, gaining validation and connection through my returning, there were some things that stood apart from what I knew to be my own truth as an adoptee. Some things the participants shared with me surprised me in that I had experienced very different emotions about certain aspects of being adopted. For example, Sanika never experienced the desire to return to her homeland and learn more about her culture until after her parents had taken her there first. She describes how her feelings have changed since her first trip back to Bangladesh but this wasn't always the case for her. This was a surprise to me as I can remember feeling a strong need to find out about my homeland and visit it for as long as I can remember. When Madelaine shared with me how that she could have done just as well without ever trying tourtiere for example along with many other culinary dishes from her biological culture, I remember thinking to myself how the opposite was true for me. I had always been drawn to Celtic music and plaid for example. The following is a journal entry that reflects upon these observations:

*As much as the obvious themes in my data are intriguing, I keep coming back to the little things that were mentioned as asides by my participants, things that stand out to me more because of the way they contrasted against some of my own feelings about being adopted than anything else. Madelaine seemed so nonchalant about her desire to find her birth family and travel back to her homeland. The way in which it happened was almost accidental and that stands out in my mind especially because I was so pro-active about my search. Her contentment with her adoption and matter-of-fact way of talking about it are so different from the intensity of my own desires as a child to explore my roots. It makes me wonder how the dynamics within the adoptive family play a role in a person's need or desires to explore their roots or whether personality figures into things as well. Yet, in spite of these differences, we still shared the want to feel a connection with our roots and the validation we both gained through our homeland trips which tells me that in spite of our individual differences, personalities and upbringings, there is something about adoption homeland trips that is greater than ourselves, something more universal (Reflexive journal entry, 02/09/2013)*

I noted observations like this in my reflexive journal and kept them in my mind as I moved through the analysis process, working to ascertain the true essences of this phenomenon. This

was a tedious and difficult process as I wanted to be sure that I arrived at essences that were indeed true to the stories the participants shared with me to convey their adoption homeland tour experiences. I also wanted to be sure that these essences were truly irreplaceable elements of the phenomenon, elements that if removed from a description of the phenomenon, would render the description incomplete or untrue. Using a multi-level data analysis approach was very helpful. I especially found that using a line-by-line coding approach helped me to stop and reflect over specific words that the participants used to describe their experiences. This pause to reflect gave me the opportunity to notice nuances and the parts of the experience only made apparent by the language the participants used. I believe that if I had left the line-by-line coding out of the analysis process I would have missed many of the important themes that contributed to the whole experience that were present in the transcripts, yet needed a second or third look to become obvious. The essences that remain after I ask myself “is it true to the participants’ experiences as they shared them with me?” and “can the phenomenon exist without this essential structure?” are:

- Feeling disconnection
- Struggling to understand identity
- Seeing and feeling a connection with roots through place
- Locating self

Together, these four essences comprise adoption homeland travel as a phenomenon. In other words, *Adoption Homeland Tours can be understood as a response to feelings of disconnection and a desire for information about identity. Adoptees are able to find a tangible connection with roots through being physically present in their homeland, seeing and experiencing it for*

*themselves, which allows them to find a connection with their roots and locate their understanding of self within a broader context of place and culture.*

## **FEELINGS OF DISCONNECTION AND DIFFERENCE**

After speaking with participants it became very clear that feelings of disconnection and difference are a constant in the experiences of adoptees. Margi stated, very succinctly, “even if I woke up and I didn’t want to be different from my family, I would always be different.” Romain echoed this sentiment:

*I didn’t really feel like I fit in, even within my own family, even jokingly I was referred to as the white kid or the white boy in the family to the point where I started joking that I was the white sheep of the family you know, but I mean, all joking aside, those types of comments and that kind of conflict created almost a need for once I was a little bit older to really figure out who I was and these are just things I think that kids who aren’t adopted take for granted, you know, they have a lot of those questions answered, you know questions about “who am I?”, “where did I come from?” don’t really exist for them but for me it was always present (Romain).*

Romain’s story highlights the ongoing feelings of disconnection and difference associated with being adopted. It is interesting to note that Romain’s perceptions of difference arose as much from other people’s perceptions of him being different as it did from his own feelings about being different from his adoptive family. Romain’s statement that “even jokingly I was referred to as the white kid or the white boy of the family to the point where I started calling myself the white sheep of the family” illustrates how his own family’s perception of Romain being different from them leads to his own self-identification as being different. His internalized feelings of difference and questions about identity were so intense that he began to identify himself as an outsider even within his family. Although he was Jamaican and adopted by Jamaican parents, the disconnect that Romain felt from his roots and from his adoptive family was so overwhelming that he took to identifying himself as “the white boy of the family” in order to express how different from them he felt.

The idea of being disconnected from one's roots was reiterated in Margi's story about what it's like to be adopted. As someone who was adopted from India and raised in North America, elements of difference and disconnection played a significant role in her adoption experience. Although she was born in India, she was raised in a predominantly Caucasian environment and there were very few instances where she had to identify with being Indian:

*I'm trying to think of the times that I actually have had to identify that I'm Indian. I was able to function completely fine without ever being "Indian" because I wasn't exposed to that culture; I wasn't really shunned so to speak. My first experience that really resonated with me as what it means to be adopted was going out to bars as a teenager, I would get all the Indian guys and they would come up to me and talk to me in Hindi and I had to explain that I was adopted and didn't speak Hindi and it was just strange because there weren't many Indian girls who would actually go out to bars so it was odd and I just felt so white and so un-Indian so for me being adopted was characterized by that total disconnection from my culture and my homeland and learning to identify myself as something completely different (Margi).*

Sanika has very few unanswered questions until she encounters other people from her culture who point out her disconnection from her native culture to her. Like Romain, Sanika's internalizing perceptions of difference is brought on by other individuals rather than herself. For Margi, her childhood in the suburbs of Chicago disconnected her from her homeland both physically and emotionally. Her lived experience as an adoptee meant feeling alienated from her Indian heritage and being forced to identify herself as something completely different from her roots.

In the same way that these participants began contemplating feelings of disconnection from their adoptive families, I experienced this in my own experiences as an adoptee:

*It was not until I was close to the age of twelve that I became acutely aware of the ways in which I was different from my adoptive family as a result of remarks they would make or interactions I had with them which highlighted my difference. Occasions like family dinners during holidays were especially wrought with the tensions of being "different". For some reason, these dinners always concluded with my parents and grand-parents*

*going around the table and pointing out characteristics or mannerisms that my siblings possessed which they got from a particular relative or which were so like great-aunt-so-and-so. When they arrived at me an awkward silence ensued until someone thought to change the subject or jump back to analyzing the genetic composition of a different sibling rather than state the obvious: nobody knew where my quirks or oddities came from because I was adopted and there simply weren't answers for those questions. If you add these moments during family dinners to the moments during church when I was the obviously off-key singer while my family sang with perfect pitch, or the moments during community BBQ's when an oblivious neighbor would exclaim "you're sisters??!! I never would have guessed, you look nothing alike!" you would have the collage of childhood moments during which dissimilarities from my family were pointed out to me, creating within me a distinct sense of feeling different from everyone around me (Reflexive journal entry, 04/13/2013)*

The role of "Feeling disconnected from adoptive families" in adoptees' decision to participate in adoption homeland tourism also links to the social work literature as discussed in Chapter Two. Research suggests that adoptees' knowledge that they are not biologically connected to their adopted family may cause problems in terms of forming meaningful relationships with others later in life, thus motivating them to seek out their biological family or to visit the country from which they are descended (Shaver, Collins, & Clark, 1996; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Weiss, 1991). For Madelaine, feeling different revolved around her shy, reserved personality, which was sharply juxtaposed against the backdrop of a loud, overbearing Ukrainian family. For Romain, feelings of disconnection bothered him so much that he took to calling himself "the white boy" in his Jamaican family in spite of the fact that he was also Jamaican. For Margi, feelings of disconnection became most noticeable during the times when she socialized with other Indian people and she was unable to converse with them in Hindi. These feelings of difference played themselves out in my story as well in the moments when I could not sing on-key with my musically talented adoptive family at church every Sunday, or when I started wearing my younger sister's hand-me-downs because she was

extremely tall and I was “petite”. “Feeling different” defined my experience and the experiences of Madelaine, Sanika, Romain and Margi as adoptees.

Hearing my participants talk about their own moments of being singled out as “different” highlighted the ways in which others’ perceptions of adoptees as being different leads to an internalization of this difference and questions about where these differences come from.

## **STRUGGLING TO UNDERSTAND IDENTITY**

Participants talked about how being adopted is inextricably linked to complicated emotions and questions about identity, difference and issues of ‘nature versus nurture’.

Participants also talked about how being adopted created a need to work through the questions regarding identity that adoption posed for them and their conscious decision to create their own identity. Romain articulated these complexities especially well as he talked about what being adopted was like for him:

*as an adoptee you start to come to terms with a lot of the sort of ingrained emotional disturbances that being adopted makes you innately subject to, you know, the abandonment issues, you know the search for identity the need to belong to something greater yet unique to you...it’s...as a kid, as a teenager there was a lot of internal un-rest, I didn’t really understand it, I wasn’t sure where it was coming from (Romain).*

Romain also talked about how his unanswered questions about his identity caused him to struggle to date anybody for many years because he was so concerned about the possibility of unknowingly being related to someone:

*Questions about “Who am I?”, “Where did I come from?” don’t really exist for normal kids but for me it was always present. As an adult, I’m still not really sure how well I can answer those questions without ever meeting my biological family and I know when I started dating you know looking at other girls you know things like that it actually became a problem, and because I’m a visible minority, whenever I’d see a black girl I’d be afraid to date her because what if she was related to me? (Romain).*



This participant's response touches upon many of the ideas that surfaced throughout the interviews such as how the drive to answer questions about identity creates conflict. For Romain, not knowing who his biological parents were made it difficult for him to form romantic relationships because he was worried that he might accidentally date someone to whom he was related.

Unanswered and ongoing questions about identity are one of the essences of the phenomenon and adoption homeland travel provided adoptees with a more contextualized sense of identity by shedding some light on these concerns. In the same way that the participants in this study and the participants described in other studies had ongoing questions about identity, I constantly questioned my identity throughout my entire childhood and adolescent years until I was able to meet my birth-mother and take a homeland tour. The idea of nature versus nurture was something that was very prominent in my mind and I was always weighing my personality, strengths, interests, weaknesses against those of my adoptive family and trying to deduce which parts of myself were learned and which were inherited. Being able to meet members of my biological family and participate in a trip to my homeland put many of these questions to rest for me and allowed me to simply "be" rather than living in a constant state of self-evaluation as I had before. Struggling to understand identity is a prominent theme in every area taken into consideration for this study and therefore is included as one of the essential structures of adoption homeland travel as I have come to understand it. Unfortunately, the existing tourism literature has not explored this type of travel in any depth and so it is my hope that this study can begin providing insights that may inspire a new avenue of research.

## SEEING AND FEELING A CONNECTION WITH ROOTS THROUGH PLACE

The importance of seeing and experiencing the homeland first-hand in order to connect with roots emerged from the analysis of the data as a one of the most central tenets of adoption homeland tourism. Adoptees identified a desire to return to their homeland in order to attain the sense of connection, which is discussed in the following essence. Margi articulated that it was important for her to return to India because she wanted a more concrete understanding of her roots:

*I wanted to see where I was born, I wanted to feel a heritage, I never bonded with my extended adopted family, so being able to feel my past is what I wanted, to feel like I came from somewhere, and I wanted to see the old temples that were thousands and thousands of years old, I just never really felt that kind of connection with the Indian culture at all growing up in the USA and I needed to go back to India so that I could feel a connection with where I came from (Margi).*

Similarly, Romain explained how the act of going back to his homeland was so important to him:

*Being half Jamaican and half Italian but raised in a Jamaican family, I always felt like I only ever understood half of myself. I know you can't quantify how much of your genetics can be attributed to what culture and so on but I just felt like I was missing half of my identity. It was important to me that I be able to go back to both Jamaica and to Italy so that I could physically experience those cultures to understand myself better and see with my own eyes the people, the culture, the buildings, all the parts that made up my history and attributed to who I am. I just needed to go there and be there and see it all for myself so that I could fill in all those blanks in my identity.*

For the participants, seeing their homeland first-hand was important to fill in the missing pieces of their respective puzzles through their adoption homeland travels.

The return home was crucial for them to gain the connections they were seeking because it allowed them to physically experience, observe and reflect on the place where they were born. The importance of the act of returning to the homeland to experience it personally is also cited through the tourism literature focusing on related niche markets. The following

provides a brief overview of the tourism literature which supports the value of observing and absorbing one's homeland personally. Legacy tourism is one niche market which shares important characteristics with adoption homeland travellers. As noted in Chapter Two, a desire for connection with roots and culture is cited in the tourism studies literature as a defining characteristic of legacy tourists. Legacy tourists have a desire to return to the place of their biological roots in order to feel tangibly connected to their homeland and to understand how aspects of the culture, language, landscape, food, music, etc. makes up a part of who they are (Pinho, 2008; McCain & Ray, 2003; Gonzalez, 2007) and these desires are also shared by adoptees who participate in Adoption Homeland Tours.

Similarly, diaspora tourism stems from a desire individuals feel to reconnect with their roots by returning to their homeland. The notion of the diaspora as a homeland from which individuals have been separated resonates strongly with the idea of an individual displaced from their birth-place or homeland through the process of adoption. One may argue that adult adoptees participating in adoption homeland tours can be seen as diaspora tourists wishing to gain a sense of connection with their homeland and may fall into either category depending on whether they are in contact with birth relatives who continue to reside within the diaspora. Additionally, the essence "locating self" as described in this study may inform diaspora literature through an illumination of the importance of tangibly connecting and being present in the homeland in order to locate self and reaffirm a contextual framework for interpretations of identity.

Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) tourism is another example of a type of tourism which fulfills a desire to gain a sense of connection with roots and culture through a physical return to a place which holds personal significance. According to Moscardo *et al.*

(2000) some VFR tourists are motivated to participate in this type of travel to fulfill a, “desire to return to places of significance in a person’s own history” (p.251). The same is true for adoption homeland tourism as participants in my study explained that their tours were an important way for them to reconnect with their roots and biological culture through their return to their homeland. In Sachdev’s (1992) study an adoptee described their need for a return to their homeland to the interviewer:

*If the person reading this has seen or read Roots and can understand Alex Haley’s satisfaction in finding his roots, you can understand what any adoptee goes through and what he or she feels. You cannot become a full person until you have the basics, that is, who you came from, what kind of family you belong to, and how big your clan is (p. 59).*

For me, this essence was especially poignant. Growing up, I remember my adoptive mother telling the story of the time her parents took her to Hungary to meet her relatives. My mother was not adopted but she grew up as an only child with no extended family living in Canada, where she was raised. Her trip to Hungary with her parents to visit relatives for the first time was so meaningful to her, even as an individual who was not adopted, that she always used to say how if I ever had the chance to meet my birth relatives and travel to my “homeland”, it would likely be so much more meaningful to me than her own trip to Hungary had been for her. This proved to be true as when I returned to the Prairies with my biological mother and grand-mother and was able to meet many of my aunts, uncles and cousins I was able to experience belonging in a profound new way after a life time of feeling different. Although simply meeting my birth-mother had an incredible effect on me, the act of physically returning to the places where my birth families were from had a profound impact on me. The following is a reflexive journal entry that I found the most poignant for me because of the way it illuminated the hermeneutic circle through its illustration of the importance of the parts and

the whole and how each part of this study's process led me to deeper and richer insights about the entire phenomenon:

*Today we drove out to Stony Plain to see my grand-parents' graves. Time was slipping away as we drove around trying to find the cemetery. I was feeling anxious, knowing that I had come all this way, was right here in Stony Plain and yet I might not make it to their graves because of a simple lack of directions. The GPS, Google maps, Canada 411, even the Stony Plain visitor's centre didn't know where the place was. A familiar frustration with being so close to a connection with my roots yet so far away from it for lack of the smallest of details overwhelmed me. Finally we lucked out and the city council's office gave us directions. Even then, we got a bit lost, but finally we found it. I knew we had to leave soon so that my host could get back home in time to wake her husband up for work. But there we were, we finally found the cemetery where my grand-parents were buried and it was surrounded by a wrought-iron gate. I was so anxious and emotionally psyched up at that point that I would have climbed the fence that separated the private realm of the cemetery from the rest of the public world...separated my birth-family from myself. I decided to actually look for a gate before I tried to climb the fence and reveal my desperation and intense need to find this gravestone to my host and any passing cars. After finding a proper entrance and getting inside the cemetery I had to run around through several feet of snow uncovering tombstones with my bare hands, trying to find their name. So I phoned him, my birth-father, in desperation for directions to the headstone I was searching for. And there it was. I had run right past it on my way in. From across the graveyard as my father gave me directions to their plot over the phone, I spotted the headstone, large, obvious, with their name clear and large across the top of it. So I ran over to it with my bouquet of flowers and knelt there in the snow feeling an intermingled sense of grief and relief to have found them. My heart felt heavy that my first meeting with my grandparents had to be there in a cemetery with their bodies cold and still in the ground. I had wanted so badly to be able to meet them.*

*As I knelt there in the snow, the knees of my jeans starting to soak through from the snow and make my legs throb from the cold, I thought about the people that I had come out west to interview in the first place. How my journey as an adoptee had led me to this study, which led me here, out west, to this cemetery and my grand-parents to continue my journey. I wondered if my participants' homeland journeys had included moments like this one, a moment embodied by a sense of closure and completion or if they had felt other things instead. As I knelt there in that cemetery with my grandparents I felt that my journey had finally come to an end. A sense of interconnectedness and completion washed over me.*

*Being there in my birth-father's hometown, thinking about the way my own journey down this road started, as I sat and interviewed Madelaine was strange. I reflected on the significance of the fact that my first interview for a project about homeland tourism was here, in this place where my birth-father grew up, a place that I had never been to, yet in some intangible way had played a role in my very existence. This place was where my grandparents who never knew about my existence were buried. Where my aunt and uncle and cousins who also knew nothing about me lived and worked and existed. And here I was: so close to all of them, yet still so far away. It was nice to*

*talk to someone else who had made a similar journey to learn about her biological roots and to learn that we had shared many of the same thoughts, moments, experiences on our separate journeys of self-discovery (Reflexive journal entry, 02/02/2013).*

Not only was I able to meet the people I was descended from but I was able to see geographically where my biological family had come from, the place that made them who they were and the characteristics of the place that they called “home”. This alone was a revelation for me and my understanding of who I was as an adoptee and the return to my homeland is what made it possible as was the case with my participants.

## **LOCATING SELF**

Madeleine and Romain talked about how experiencing the culture of their homeland made them feel like they fit in; like their idiosyncrasies were traits that *connected* them to their roots rather than *separating* them from their families. For Madelaine, finding out that her birth-father was just as shy as she was made her feel a connection with her birth-father and a better understanding of herself now that she knew where her shyness came from. For Romain, it was an experience during his homeland tour that made him realize that his adoptive parents cared about him and that he truly belonged to his family and was not just a “guest” as he had felt all his life. This experience was very significant for him because it validated his place in his family. The story he chose to share to illustrate this point went like this:

*there was another experience that I think was the first time that my parents sort of became my parents specifically my dad and I guess I kind of felt like a foster child a lot of my life and I remember, you know, I, they were always kind of disciplinarian “don’t do this, don’t do that, don’t play in traffic, don’t jump off the garage” you know, things like that, I’d get consequences for disobeying my parents you know whatever, but there in Jamaica, out behind the house there was a chicken coop and I mean GIANT, this thing was probably 10 feet high and on top of it there was a rooster and my dad says to me “I know it looks tempting because I KNOW YOU but DON’T go up there and bug the rooster so you know being the person I am I waited for them to go about their business and start doing something else and I thought to myself “you know, I’m going to go up there, I’ve never seen a rooster up close what’s the worst that could happen?” so I climb up there*

*and my head goes up past the roof of this coop and he turns and squawks and I've never heard any bird make this sound and he charges at me and he hits me right here between my eyes and I'm 10 feet up in the air so he pecks me really hard and I let go and I basically fall 10 feet and I land flat on my back on the ground in the gravel/sand/mango seeds in the back yard and you know I guess they heard me yell because a bunch of them came outside and my Dad knew what happened immediately he saw me and was like SIGH "I thought I told you not to go up there, why did you do that? I told you specifically because I knew this was going to happen, roosters are dangerous why did you do a stupid stunt like that?" and it was in that moment that I realized you know aside from all the complicated emotions attached to being adopted and all the abandonment issues and the inability to really identify with most of my family it was in that moment that I realized that my Dad was my father and that he was actually, when they were saying "don't do this, don't do that" it wasn't an exercise in control but literally they wanted to keep me safe and you know I came within a 1/4 of an inch of losing one of my eyes if that thing had pecked me here instead of here, that's it you know and my dad was mad but he was also really scared it was sort of the fear that made it really poignant and it really hit home for me and I don't think had I been in Canada and something similar had happened that I would have had the same reaction but that experience alone probably brought me a lot of comfort and a lot of closure to some of the more complicated emotional aspects of being adopted like not feeling like your family is really your family um you know it's not really like you're a visitor or a guest because I remember feeling that way a lot of the time growing up I felt like my room wasn't really my room I was kind of just borrowing all of this stuff you never know as an adopted kid if they were ever going to just take you back (Romain).*

Romain's story about falling from the rooster coop illustrated for him the moment during his homeland tour that he realized that he was a valued member of his family. For him, the homeland tour meant receiving the affirmation and validation that he needed as an adoptee and to feel like he was just as important a family member as everyone else in his family.

Other participants described how the homeland tour meant learning about a part of themselves with which they were unfamiliar. When asked to tell a story that illustrates what the homeland tour meant to her, Margi talked about how going on the tour helped her learn about her Indian-self, the part of herself she didn't know about yet:

*It meant meeting the Indian part of myself like I worked really hard to become who I wanted to be, now I needed to meet that part of me that I didn't know about per se, my obvious visible differences, I'm going to be held up to a yardstick because of the way I look on the outside so I wanted to meet that part of myself that I "should be", I only had*

*the stereotypes to go by before so this allowed me to learn what it's actually like to be Indian (Margi).*

Sanika also shared a story, which represented her opportunity to connect with a part of herself she didn't know much about. Sanika talked about how she had the opportunity to meet the woman who found her and took care of her until she was adopted and how meeting this woman allowed her to learn about what she was like as a small child:

*Meeting Trisha, who was my La (or nanny) when I was a baby was a really significant part of my tour. She found me after I was abandoned and took care of me until I was adopted and after that when my parents worked until we moved to Canada and spent a lot of time with me during the first few months of my life. My parents said I had a very good relationship with her. It was nice to finally meet the woman I have seen pictures of and heard so much about my entire life. Trisha was able to tell me more about how she found me and what I was like as a baby which I had previously not known anything about. Upon meeting Trisha she said that I had the same hands as when I was a baby. Hands are a big part of the Bengali culture and it was meaningful to me that she pointed this out. It made me feel connected to my past and more a part of my culture in some way, like I was still Bengali even if I had been raised somewhere else. For me, the tour meant reconnecting with my past and gaining a sense of connection to a part of myself I didn't know much about (Sanika).*

For Sanika, the tour meant being able to feel more connected with herself and with her past and to learn more about her identity and the culture of her homeland.

From listening to the stories the participants shared as a way to illustrate what the tours meant to them, it is apparent that each of their experiences were significant for numerous reasons and played an important role in their journeys as adoptees.

Margi also spoke about how her experiences during the tour helped her gain a sense of connection with her biological culture that was previously lacking:

*I never really felt that kind of connection with the culture at all before my tour. We went to a holy site, a gat, I was able to go down and pray with a Shaman he had me say whatever he was saying and I just mimicked what he was saying, I did the prayers and everything it was really significant to me, I felt like I was part of that tradition and that culture, that was really special to me (Margi).*



For Madelaine, participating in a homeland tour gave her a sense of validation and normalcy.

As she explained it:

*It's nice to... it's nice to know where you come from....like it was nice to know that my Dad is so shy and even my aunt, we're quite the same. It's kind of nice to have that validation, you're not just "odd", there's someone else just like you (Madelaine).*

The social work literature about adoption reunions helps position the idea of self within a larger context; these examples are not included in the tourism literature as the subject has not been addressed from a tourism perspective. In Sachdev's (1992) study of adoption reunions found in the social work literature, an adoptee explained "Finding my birth Mom and learning about myself and my ancestors has been like reading my autobiography. It has given me a new identity for the first time in 30 years. I really know now who I am (Sachdev, 1992, p.64). Similarly, Passmore's (2004) study and work by Darongkamas and Lorenc, (2010) emphasizes how important it is for an adoptee to explore the opportunity to locate self through participation in adoption homeland travel.

Whether in the form of a reunion with biological relatives or an adoption homeland tour, a re-connection with roots allows the adoptee to locate self. Insights gained during homeland tours helped give participants an understanding of themselves and sense of context within which to understand themselves. Romain talked about how his experiences in Jamaica opened his eyes to his culture and gave him a new understanding of himself. During a "eureka moment", his tour revealed to him parts of his personality he wasn't aware of. In his own words:

*I think, I remember this might sound a little strange, I remember walking around the neighborhood where we were staying my Mom was from Kingston she grew up in the city she was as much of a city girl as you could have in a developing nation, my dad grew up*

*in the country so a good chunk of the trip we spent up in the mountains, in the hills with some of his relatives and I remember walking down the street and coming back to the house and going around back and they were cooking in the back yard just like soup, like a goat stew and they were roasting bread fruit over an open pit fire and it was all very sort of utilitarian, almost bohemian in a way and I remember thinking to myself “if I saw this in Canada I would be kind of shocked by it, like what are all the homeless people doing?” but in the hills of Jamaica that’s just sort of how things are done and it didn’t seem strange or out of the ordinary it felt very comfortable and there was a real sense of having been there before in some way, shape or form or just being really comfortable in that type of environment, almost like coming home but not, you know? Which is very strange for me because my personality speaks entirely to different things like I like nice things, I pride myself in being very...well I try to be eloquent and to put up a more refined store front and that’s kind of always been there even when I was a little kid I was the kid at the front of the class reading to the other kids, you know, I’ve always tried to come off a little bit less bush and a little bit more country club but it was a strange experience because even though it was a complete contradiction to who I saw myself as it was a bit of a eureka moment because I was like “wait a minute”, there’s a whole lot more to me that I see through this window I’m looking through now into this Jamaican culture and it created almost a strange sense of pride all of a sudden knowing that there was more to me than I originally thought (Romain).*

For Romain, participating in a homeland tour provided insights about who he was as an individual; he realized that there was more to him than he was previously aware. His tour helped him realize that although he was naturally attracted to nice things and “tried to put up a more refined store front”, he enjoyed the simplistic lifestyle in his homeland and felt “strangely comfortable” participating in the Jamaican culture. Like Romain, Margi also talked about how one of the insights she gained from her tour experience was an understanding that the rich cultural and artistic history of her homeland is part of who she is:

*We went to a place where they make clay statues it was just in the back alley, it felt more like daily life, it was amazing actually, they made mud statues with their hands, they were very talented, they said Calcutta in that area is very artsy, it’s more music and literature and dance than other places in India. When the tour guide brought us to the statue makers and we saw how the rugs are made and the amount of work that goes in to the cultural parts of India, it made me feel very proud, because I’m from there and I’m a part of that (Margi).*

Having the opportunity to visit and see first-hand the talent and artistry that exists in her homeland gave Margi a sense of belonging to something special in the same way that it did for Romain.

While sharing their tour experiences with me, participants spoke to the sense of closure and completion they had gained as a result of their trip. Sanika said that her tour didn't make her feel any differently about being adopted, just more informed, "After taking the tour I don't feel any different about being adopted. Just more informed about the place I was born. I want to bring my fiancé and my future children to Bangladesh one day, so that they too can truly understand where my roots lie".

For Romain, the trip had a significant impact on his feelings about being adopted. In summarizing the impact of his tour experience, Romain explained: "If I had to sum it up I would say that the experience kind of was essential in completing me. It gave me the tools I needed to understand myself, I didn't have those tools beforehand and wasn't able to do so". For Margi, the tour experience helped her clarify her sense of identity and her attitude towards becoming the person that she wants to be:

*Because I'm empathetic and care so much I have the complete opposite of the survival of the fittest attitude that I saw in India. I wish I could identify with that a bit more to feel some connection to my past or my genes or something but I just don't identify with that self-serving, not caring about the people around you attitude and I know that's because my parents had that impact on me and they raised me to care about people. Because I spent so much time becoming who I wanted to be I didn't have any cultural base other than being American so for me the trip really just allowed me to incorporate more parts into who I am and what I understand about being Indian rather than becoming who I should be according to my culture . . . seeing a world like that, it's very overwhelming, it helped me develop limitations to what I can identify with, as an adoptee, as an Indian, as an American as what I worked hard to become (Margi).*

One of the most profound insights gained from the homeland tour experience was that personality traits, likes, dislikes or idiosyncrasies, which had previously caused adoptees to

feel a sense of alienation or difference now made them feel a sense of connection to their roots and provided them with the tools they needed to locate self within the context of the history, geography and legacy of their homeland. The old sense of being a “misfit” was replaced by the feeling that they now “fit” somewhere. Insights also included realizing parts of themselves that the participants weren’t really aware of prior to the trip. My homeland tourism experience provided these insights exactly. The personality traits that had previously made me feel insecure and different around my family, such as my keen interest in all things technological, my love of learning, my reserved disposition or my lack of musical abilities, all of a sudden became things that I had in common with my birth family. They became things I was proud to share with my family. Additionally, I learned from my homeland tour that I had a Scottish ancestry that I had been unaware of. This revelation provided new pathways to learning more about myself and my roots. Romain spoke to this insight when he talked about how he had always prided himself in keeping a well-kept appearance and having a preference for fine, expensive things yet his homeland tour showed him that he also had a side to his personality that appreciated simple living. This revelation was validating insight for Romain and he talked about how his tour was essential in that it provided him with the tools he needed to better understand himself. The literature echoes this essence in the accounts of adoptees gaining personal validation through reconnection with their roots. One adoptee quoted in Affleck and Steed stated: “I now have a strong sense of self and can regard myself as a worthwhile person” (2001, p.42).

In my literature review I provide an overview of the motivations literature in order to provide a background to some of the more prominent approaches to understanding travel motivations. I would like to take this discussion up again in order to address the relationship between participants’ motivations for participating in adoption homeland travel and the

essences of the phenomenon. In other words, it is important to revisit the motivations literature here because it helps one understand how the essences address some of the participants' motivations for participating in adoption homeland travel.

As I spoke with the participants, it became more and more apparent that the desire to gain a better understanding of "where they came from" was an important motivating factor in their individual decisions to participate in adoption homeland travel. When participants were asked why they decided to engage in adoption homeland travel, responses ranged from concise to elaborate.

Madelaine's motivation for travelling to her birth-place, a small town in Alberta a few hours away from where she was raised, was two-fold. Primarily she wanted to learn about her roots, to gain a better understanding of who she was through gaining a greater understanding of where she came from.

Madelaine also wanted to pursue the unique opportunity to meet her birth family during her trip, which was a strong motivating factor in her decision to participate. She also stated that learning about her family and their traditions was an important reason for her to participate in a tour. Travelling to that physical space to gain a point of relative geographical connection was as important as the biological connection in addressing unanswered questions about difference and identity.

Sanika chose to participate in a homeland tour more because of her parents' desire for her to visit her homeland than her own desire. For Sanika, her family's desire for her to see her homeland played a larger role in her decision to take a homeland tour than her own desires. While later in life she realized the importance and the value of her tour, at the time she chose to participate in order to please her parents and to satisfy their wishes for her to see where she was

born. For Sanika, her initial adoption homeland travel experience was encouraged by her parents own need for their daughter to connect to her homeland by physically being there, experiencing the culture and reconnecting with the woman who had found and taken care of Sanika as an infant. Her parents recognized the importance of returning to where Sanika was born and the return to her homeland was something that they wanted to facilitate for their daughter. For Sanika, her parent's need for her to gain a connection to her roots through a return to the homeland was the motivating factor in the decision to travel back to Bangladesh though now as an adult, Sanika can appreciate the value of this trip and has expressed a desire to continue returning to Bangladesh in order to build her understanding of her biological roots and culture.

Conversely, Romain decided to participate in a homeland tour because he really wanted to explore and learn about his roots and because he didn't want to be someone who identified with a culture he had yet to experience. As he explains in his response to the question:

*"I needed to explore and really become interested in my roots and not just say I didn't grow up in Jamaica so I don't really care or know what's going on there or don't really want to experience much of the food, I'm fine with chicken mcnuggets and apple slices and it made me realize that being open to experiencing that didn't diminish who I was becoming on my own"* (Romain).

For Romain, a desire to learn more about his roots was an important motivating factor in his decision to participate in a homeland tour. Additionally, he realized that having the desire to explore his roots would not detract from his understanding of who he was as an adoptee or the person he had worked hard to become and this realization helped motivate him to pursue taking a homeland tour. Romain's own need to connect with his roots through space and

place moved him from feeling disconnected from everyone to feeling connected with his roots, his homeland and with his adopted family.

Finally, attachment theory as described in the literature review offers insights into adoptees' motivations for taking an adoption homeland trip. Attachment theory suggests that adoptees have difficulty forming strong relationships in life because of their knowledge that they have been disconnected from their biological families (Shaver, Collins, & Clark, 1996; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Weiss, 1991). This theory seems to fit with the ideas conveyed in the discussion of the essences and supports the idea that adoptees feel a desire to reconnect with their roots because they want to feel connected to a place and to themselves. Chronis' (2012) work on tourism and sense of place describes the significance of being physically present in a place in order to fully experience it:

*In doing tourism, tourists are engaged in an embodied way, making sense of the surroundings through sensory experiences (Crouch, 1999; Rodaway, 1994). A tourist place is experienced through the "sensuous immediacy" of the material surroundings (Haldrup & Larsen, 2006). Tourists are "engulfed in space" (Crouch, 2004) and they encounter the destination by engaging all the senses: touch, smell, sight, hearing, and taste (Andrews, 2009, 2011). The body is used to produce the experience of "being in and part of place" (Filipucci, 2002, p. 89). (p. 1800).*

From a phenomenological perspective, the findings of this study can help inform tourism research seeking to gain a deeper understanding of tourists' experiences. This premise is supported by Santos & Yan's (2010) study of genealogical tourism, a study which employed a phenomenological lens. Santos & Yan state "In the context of tourism, while not widely utilized, phenomenology represents a promising tool for understanding tourists' experiences" (Caton and Santos 2007; Ingram 2002; Masberg and Silverman 1996). Additionally, Kivel, Johnson and Scraton (2009) argue that there needs to be a shift from an emphasis on activity to

an emphasis on experience and the dynamics that influence the meaning of experiences. Phenomenology's emphasis on experience and the essential structures that comprise experience position it as the appropriate methodology to bring forward this shift in emphasis when approaching tourism studies. In this study, the use of hermeneutic phenomenology provides this emphasis on experience rather than activity as it explored the complex relationships between emotion, experience, interpretation, and meaning for adult adoptees during adoption homeland tours. Moreover, the phenomenological framework of this study reminds one of the importance of considering the parts that comprise the whole and future tourism studies which explore tourists' experiences may benefit from this type of consideration, through a phenomenological lens.

In summary, adoption homeland travel does not erase an adoptee's negative adoption experiences or fix them but it has the potential to address questions and a tension often experienced by adoptees and offers a new way to connect with roots and locate self. Feelings of disconnection and struggles to understand identity make Adoption Homeland Tours a meaningful avenue to gain new connections with one's roots and culture. Understanding the essences which make up the phenomenon, the parts that comprise the whole gives us a more holistic understanding of the subject. One cannot fully understand what adoption homeland travel means to an adoptee until they have understand each aspect of the experience individually in order to see how each aspect is vital to the meaning of the experience in its entirety.



## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RESEARCH**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This study endeavored to explore what it is like to be adopted, the meaning of adoption homeland travel and how, if at all, the homeland travel experience provides the adoptee with deeper understandings or feelings about being adopted.

As the participants shared their stories with me and I shared mine with them we were able to draw out the thoughts, feelings and insights that are part of an adoption homeland travel experience.

This process of sharing, analysing and reflecting through the use of a reflexive journal brought me to the four essential structures of the phenomenon which have in turn allowed me to answer the research questions guiding this study.

Although being an adult adoptee can mean struggling to understand identity, experiencing feelings of disconnection, adoption homeland travel can provide an avenue to connect with roots and locate self. This is significant because it offers adult adoptees or parents of adopted children an experience that may clarify notions of identity and sense of self. While tour companies specializing in adoption homeland tours have already realized the potential homeland tours have to provide families with adoptees in terms of cultural support and understanding of the adoptee's roots, the implications of these findings have not yet been considered in terms of new possibilities for tourism research or support services available for adoptees.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

While exploring the essential structures of the phenomenon has been the focus of this study there are additional themes that weren't as important to the phenomenon yet merit

mentioning in this discussion as they may lend direction to possibilities for future research. It is noteworthy that the accounts of women who search for connections with their roots dominate the relevant literature on adoption searches. The social work literature points out that it is primarily women who search to learn about their roots rather than men (Müller and Perry, 2001; Grotevant, 1997; Passmore, 2004; Clapton, 2003). Little explanation is provided in the literature to account for this trend. Additional insights into the phenomenon may be gained during future studies, which address this trend by posing questions about the role of gender in adoption searches or adoption homeland tours. This trend has left me with numerous questions including:

- How does gender influence decisions regarding adoption or adoption reunions?
- How does gender influence decisions to participate in adoption homeland travel?
- Are men under-represented in the literature on adoption searches and adoption homeland tourism?
- Do women appear to be the majority of adoptees searching because they are more willing to share their experiences with others?

Other possibilities for future research may involve the researcher participating in a homeland tour with other adoptees in order to observe adoptees' encounters with their biological culture first-hand through participant observation. Alternatively, involving adoptees in a study prior to their homeland experience may pose interesting opportunities to involve activities like video blogs or journaling exercises during the actual homeland tour itself in order to capture fresh thoughts, ideas and emotional responses to the insights and connections that might be made during a homeland tour. Future studies involving a larger sample size are also

recommended in order to gain deeper and richer insights by speaking with more people. Additionally, this would be helpful in order to identify other essences where appropriate.

While this study focused on the meaning of adoption and adoption homeland tours for adoptees, it would be interesting to explore other facets of adoption and adoption homeland tours through a phenomenological lens such as family members' reactions to adoptees' decisions to participate in tours and how, if at all, adoption homeland tours influence an adoptee's ability to relate and connect with their adoptive family post-tour.

This study may be complemented by future inquiries, which seek out understanding of adoptee's insights and emotions following adoption homeland tours through a longitudinal study. This may provide a fitting framework in which to further explore a hermeneutic approach to the development of interpretation and meaning over time. For myself, reflecting on my adoption homeland tour experiences over a period of ten years has allowed me to gain new perspectives and richer understandings of subjects such as adoption, family, cultural values and identity. As my journey continues, these subjects appropriate richer, multi-dimensional meanings, which evolve through my experiences and interactions with family and other adoptees.

Finally, this study may provide a starting point for developing language to describe this type of travel since it seems to draw on so many different areas of the tourism literature such as legacy tourism, diaspora tourism, roots tourism, visiting friends and relatives tourism in addition to the social work literature on the subject of adoption reunions. For the sake of this study I have used the term "Adoption Homeland Travel" rather than just "Homeland Travel" in order to differentiate the adoptee's travel experience from other individuals' travel experiences during a return to their homeland as unlike other populations

who have experienced a displacement from their homeland, adoptees are displaced from not only from their homeland but from their birth-families as well.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study of this subject is significant because it has contributed to understanding of a little-known type of tourism. Numerous organizations offering adoption homeland tours can be found on the internet through search engines like Google, along with many blogs about adoption homeland tourism experiences (See Appendix B) and one particular adoption website has radio segments about adoption homeland tours that make reference to the small volume of research available on the subject (Creating a Family, Radio Shows, 2010). With this in mind, practically speaking, this study is of particular importance because it contributes new literature, providing new insights about what these experiences mean to the adoptees, which in turn will help inform how these organizations can facilitate tours which allow adoptees to explore their biological roots in order to create new connections with their history and gain a better understanding of their identity. If tour organizations are aware of the emotional tensions adoptees experience and the specific ways that adoption homeland travel can alleviate these tensions, they may be able to tailor their packages more specifically to meet these needs. In short, this study provides a rationalization for the importance of offering adoptees a way to work through their questions about identity and difference through a popular activity like tourism.

From a methodological point-of-view, this study provides insights to the academic community and contributes to the body of tourism research using phenomenological inquiry. Specifically, this study provides an example of a tourism study using phenomenology that adheres to the underpinnings of the methodology and uses the guidelines for data collection and

data analysis laid out by the founders of phenomenology such as Gadamer, Husserl, Heidegger and van Manen. Presently, tourism studies which use phenomenology have been criticized for doing a poor job of applying the goals of phenomenology within a tourism framework (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010). Another study which employs a phenomenological lens to tourism studies is Santos and Yan's (2010) study of genealogical tourists. While this study incorporates the use of essences in its data analysis and discusses the importance of participants' interpretation of meaning, it does not incorporate reflexivity into its discussion although the researchers mention the importance of reflexivity for phenomenology in their methodology section. This study of Adoption Homeland Tourism sought to apply a phenomenological lens to an area of tourism, which has to date received little attention through an analysis which focuses on meaning, interpretation and understanding as a co-constructive process and also sought to incorporate a reflexive approach into the data analysis and discussion section in keeping with the underpinnings of phenomenology. As we move into a time where experience-based tourism is in greater demand, phenomenology may become a more highly sought after methodological framework for tourism studies. Finally, understanding the meaning of adoptees' finding "roots" through "place" and travel choice is important to their ability to connect to critical roots, ancestors, culture, and it closes the circle in understanding who we all are.

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## **APPENDIX A: ORGANIZATIONS OFFERING ADOPTION HOMELAND TOURS**

### Organizations offering Adoption Homeland Tours

Always and Forever	<a href="http://www.alwaysandforever.us">www.alwaysandforever.us</a>
TIES Program	<a href="http://www.adoptivefamilytravel.com">www.adoptivefamilytravel.com</a>
Romania Adoption Homeland Tour	<a href="http://www.romanianorphanministries.com">www.romanianorphanministries.com</a>
Homeland Tours with Legacy Journeys	<a href="http://www.gwca.org/events/homeland_tours.com">www.gwca.org/events/homeland_tours.com</a>
China Oriental Travel	<a href="http://www.chinaorientaltravel.com/adoption-tour.php">www.chinaorientaltravel.com/adoption-tour.php</a>
A Bright Moon	<a href="http://www.abrightmoon.com">www.abrightmoon.com</a>
Korea Homeland Tours	<a href="http://www.koreahomelandtours.com">www.koreahomelandtours.com</a>
Lotus Travel: China Homeland Tours	<a href="http://www.lotustours.net">www.lotustours.net</a>
Children's Bridge	<a href="http://www.childrensbridge.com/homelandvisits/index.html">www.childrensbridge.com/homelandvisits/index.html</a>

### Adoption Homeland Tour Blogs

Creating a Family: Homeland Tours

<http://www.creatingafamily.org/blog/adoptive-parenting/homeland-tours/>

Jewish Family & Children's Service Blog

<http://www.jfcsboston.org/DefaultPermissions/Blog/tabid/324/EntryId/46/The-Lifelong-Journey-of-Adoption-Sharing-a-Missing-Piece.aspx>

Families Through Korean Adoption

<http://ftkamadison.blogspot.com/2010/05/homeland-tour-adult-gathering.html>

Adoption Talk: China Sponsored Homeland Tours

<http://chinaadoptiontalk.blogspot.com/2009/09/china-sponsored-homeland-tours.html>

A Kind of Magick: An Adoption Journey and Beyond

<http://www.blogger.com/blogin.g?blogspotURL=http://akindofmagick1.blogspot.com/&zx=1j3l4vvm5pg5ge&pli=1>

An Online Journal of our Adoption Journey: All About Autumn

<http://www.thomasfamilyclan.info/autumn/>

Research-China.org

<http://research-china.blogspot.com/>

## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1) What is it like to be adopted?

[Probe - Can you tell me a story from your experience that represents to you what it means to be adopted? *Thanks for sharing that story. Why did you share that story with me? What does that story mean for you?*]

2) Why did you decide to take a tour?

[Probe - Can you tell me a story about your adoption homeland tour experience that illustrates what the trip meant to you? *Thanks for sharing that story. Why did you share that story with me? What does that story mean for you?*]

3) What, if any, insights did your tour experience provide?

4) How do you feel about being adopted after taking this trip?